On Rearing an Ugly Head:

Joel-Peter Witkin and the Mysticism of the "Ugly Aesthetic"

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BLLAMA002

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree

Master of Arts

University of Cape Town

Faculty of Humanities

2020

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary photographer, Joel-Peter Witkin, has described his remaking of some of the most iconic paintings in the history of art as a "divine revolt". However, there are no attempts to unravel the meaning of this project nor to analyse the visual changes that Witkin has made. This thesis argues that Witkin's re-creations serve to subvert the negation or diminishment of ugliness in art history's depictions of the mystical, and to present the experience of ugliness as alternatively inherently Godly. Through engaging in the problems in philosophical aesthetics, it contrasts the notions "aesthetically ugly" (a quality that cannot be objectively identified and studied because it ascribes aesthetic non-worth) with the "ugly aesthetic", which refers to the "perceptive-felt" experience of an object. By integrating descriptions of this experience of the ugly aesthetic with those of the early development stage of the "psychoanalytic pre-symbolic", it provides heuristics with which to identify perceptual identifiers ugly objects, ugly worlds and the expression of ugly feelings in mystical invocations of paintings of three chosen art historical periods and Witkin's re-creations. In his reconstructing of the heavenly realms given Renaissance paintings of *Leda and the Swan* (1510-1515) and *The Birth of Venus* (1485), Witkin makes a "pre-symbolic" space with ugly objects to present a contrary vision of an ugly dwelling place for God. In amending the Catholic Baroque's *Little Fur* (1638) and the Protestant Baroque's *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (1646), the artist replaces mystical feelings that imbue scenes of ugly objects with an expression of ugly feelings themselves, thereby guiding the viewer into a full immersion into these objects the real site of Godly experience instead. This theoretical formulation and its application to the works at hand, evidence that Witkin's work points to the mystical power of the ugly aesthetic to unleash a personal and collective memory of Godly reality as ontologically formless and mysterious, and thereby makes a case for ugliness' value.

Keywords: Joel-Peter Witkin, ugliness, mysticism, aesthetic-art historical, psycho-analytic pre-symbolic, psychological aesthetics, the photographic grotesque

DEDICATION

For my dad,
who gave me the audacity
to ask big questions
and
for my mom,
who bequeathed the tenacity
to work at them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been shaped and formed by the input of so many, to whom I wish to express my deep gratitude:

Thank you to Professor Higgins for his willingness to house this project: for his open-minded attitude to independent, creative scholarship. I have benefitted so much from his ethos of writerly discipline and restraint—the "streamlining" and "straitjacketing". Thank you for helping me to weave a genial, speakerly voice through that which may otherwise have been taut and technical.

Words cannot express my gratitude to my family, who have generously provided me with this fruitful opportunity. I thank them for bountiful care and support, and for the formidable cultural and artistic heritage that they have imparted. I have been profoundly inspired by my father's intrepid exploration of the darkness and discipline, and by my mother's expansive knowledge and meticulousness. I also exceptionally lucky to have the affectionate and light-hearted life-companionship of my twin brother.

I am overwhelmed by the immeasurable joy and unconditional love that I have received from my life-partner, Jaron. I have been captivated by his ability to traverse the large-scale and long-term. I am wondrously grateful for his winding park-walk chats, mapping the journey, his ceaseless faith in the project (through the tears and travails) and his clean and fit mind. *Todah rabah* to a cuddler, coach and clock-keeper.

The spirits and lessons of countless friends, mentors and intellectual companions infuse this work. I have profound appreciation for the insights of luminous minds and for the compassion of big-hearted confidants. You are all magnanimous teachers who met me on this winding path, bearing beaming gifts.

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INTRODUCTION

In his photographic monologue, *Gods of Earth and Heaven*, the contemporary American photographer, Joel-Peter Witkin, described his posting of an advertisement calling for models for his photographs:

> Pinheads, dwarfs, giants, hunchbacks, pre-op transsexuals, bearded women, people with tails, horns, wigs, reversed hands or feet, anyone born without arms, legs, eyes, breasts, genitals, ears, nose, lips. All people with unusually large genitals. All manners of extreme perversion. Hermaphrodite and teratoids (alive and dead). Beings from other planets. Anyone bearing the wounds of Christ. Anyone claiming to be God. God (Witkin, 1989, *Afterword*).

What is striking here is the juxtaposition of the usually taboo with the spiritual and sanctified. This artist is well-known for remaking some of Western art's iconic paintings in transgressive photographs that include corpses, dismembered body parts, decaying matter, socially marginalised people (including those with various types of deformity or transgender and intersexual identities or sexual perversities), alongside religious references. In his artistic reflections in *Aperture*, the artist refers to his work as a "divine revolt" (Witkin, 1985, p. 34). However, as shall be demonstrated below, the meaning of this spiritual rebellion is neither explained by him nor explored in commentaries on his work. Against what Godly ideas, presented in these artworks, is Witkin rebelling? What alternative view does he wish to express through his visual changes?

This thesis aims to present the argument that this photographer's style serves to query and overturn the diminished role given to ugliness in aesthetics in general, and more particularly its place in the mystical, in the art-historical styles of the paintings he references. Alternatively, it presents ugliness as the intrinsic entry point for contact with the Godly. As of yet, no aesthetic-spiritual art-historical analyses of Witkin's oeuvre has been pursued. There exist no in-depth visual interpretations of this artist's work as framed through the specific concepts of "ugliness" or "mysticism", nor are the details of his amendments identified or studied. Consequently, a crucial aesthetic-art historical conversation that is opened by his work has been overlooked. This thesis suggests that the dearth of such interpretations is a result of the absence of a framework with which to read the ugly-mystical relation in artworks. Both phenomena seem ineffable and unidentifiable. How can ugliness be identified in art, when it is a subjective judgment upon which there cannot be universal agreement? Furthermore, how might experiences of the infinite, transcendent

Absolute Being be brought into the limited realm of the "visible and sensible" (Osbourne, 1986, p. 554)? As the contemporary philosopher, Scruton (2004a) puts it, Iconoclasm, the "graven image" and anthropomorphism, which "… began with Moses, still rages today" (p. 124). Therefore, a process for uncovering divine depiction in the artwork is called for, if we are to decipher Witkin's message about ugliness' mysticism.

There is evidence that, without such insights, critics do not recognise the presence of a quality of ugliness in Witkin's subject matter or formal qualities. This omission occurs because ugliness is commonly understood to denote aesthetic badness, and it would be inaccurate to apply this term to the photographs, given their technical and formal mastery. Wilson (2000) writes that "[f]ans celebrate Witkin's ability to make the ugly beautiful" (p. 7). Seward (1993) concurs that their "rendering is so beautiful, you just might say Yes" (para. 2). Mullarkey (1987) calls him a "visionary" with "surprising beauty" (p. 107), and the art critic Kozloff (1984) describes his work as a form of "disagreeable beauty" (p. 45). Beem (2008) describes his work as being "darkly disturbing yet exquisitely crafted" (para. 2). Wilson agrees that "despite his darkly fertile imagination", much of his work is "masterfully printed" (p. 12), and, so too, does Noble (2003), who reckons his technique of printing is "complex and meticulous" (para. 1). Biles (2013) acclaims Witkin's work as being "worthy and distinctive" because of the "breadth and quality of reproductions." (p. 56). Critics do employ synonyms of ugliness that are neutral in judgement. They thereby argue that some neglected residual meaning of the term, other than its negativity, requires excavation. Adams (1991) goes so far as to deem Witkin's oeuvre as exemplary of an entire genre of the 1980s, called the "photographic grotesque" (para. 3). Stokes (2009) maintains that the photographs are an instance of the "entropic Gothic of physical pathology" (p. 156), and Coke (1985) alludes to a quality of being both "carnivalesque" and "surreal" (p. 6). Stevens (1995), describes his work as so "macabre" that "even the most jaded eye must take a pause; even those who recoil must wonder at such a sensibility" (p. 91).

There is a preoccupation with the idea that Witkin's subject matter is used to shock. The scandalous quality of this maverick's 'offensive' work lends to criticisms of it being empty and 'for effect'. Adams (1991) describes it as being "melodramatic" (p. 207), and Stevens (1995) comments on the use of shallow histrionics, the "theatrical skills": he "inflates … yanking the bleeding images out his heart" (p. 91). He notes that it bears the "gutsy self-consciousness" (p.

208) of the grotesque period of the 1980s (this includes the work of Joan Fontcuberta and the team of Akin and Ludwig). For these critics, these photographs were a "necessary purgative of the Greed Decade", which was ruled out by "politically correct revisionists" of the 1990s (p. 209). Wilson (2000) further considers the zeitgeist of Witkin's style in a tongue-in-cheek website article, in which she lampoons the work for being "dated" (para. 43) and "post-punk" (para. 36). Although "we all need our fright-wig period", she writes, "only the most fearful artists feel such a heavy, pounding need to express such adolescent, in-your-face ideas about life, death and morality" (para. 51). Witkin's work is thus "deserving of his place on the shelf with all the other fine staples of Goth-style shock-rock – Nine Inch Nails, Michael Gera and the Swans, all that nasty Baudelaire yadda yadda, black-clad ultra-serious teenaged Todesangst" (Wilson, 2000, para. 35). For Berkowitch (2005), these photographs conjure Milgram's famous psychology experiment: "The test reveals the human indifference to suffering" (p. 19).[1] However, in such readings, there is meagre reflection on any potential of the meaning of the viewer's forced confrontation with that which disturbs or provokes, for example, or in its potential for spiritual revelation or growth.

Ethical concerns are raised about some of this subject matter. However, this thesis will argue that such interpretations are blinded because they attend only to the fact *that* Witkin's has photographed such things. They ignore complex meanings added by the formal qualities of the artwork, and associations implanted through art-historical references and cues. Noble (2003) writes that such artistic innovation "challenges the boundaries of acceptable taste" – the word "taste" having aesthetic or moral implications. Witkin's work is widely described as "controversial" or "provocative" (Hagen, 1993; Bailey, 2017). McKenna (1989) notes: "Joel-Peter Witkin's volatile photographs are considered to be the very cutting edge of the art form by some – and dismissed as flagrant … by others" (para. 1). For Dermer (1999), his photography of so-called "vulnerable subjects" is further accused of replicating the exploitative dynamics of the freak show, by which subjects become objects to be stared at and enjoyed as "exotic" spectacle (p. 250). While social

[1] Furthermore, in a short documentary about Witkin entitled *Vile Bodies*, Goldberg questions whether adding shock value in the remaking of particular paintings enhances the original message or is simply an indulgent "luxuriating in the gory details" (Townsend, 1998). In the case of the genre of vanitas paintings, for example, the message o*f memento mori* is conveyed strongly without the addition of Witkin's sensationalistic dead, abandoned, stitched infant bodies of *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990).

mores forbid a "stare" at this "divine monster" or biological anomaly (from the twentieth century onwards), Witkin's photography "permits us to stare openly" (Dermer, p. 251). In Beyst's (2006) words, his photographs "lift the reigning taboo on deformation, illness, suffering and death of the freak" (p.5). Even when some of these ethical questions bear greater psychological nuance, there is still no attention given to the distinct visual qualities in the works. For example, Davis (1991) simply asserts that the artist's use fantasy manipulates the viewer into colluding with his kind of Sadean abuse of power and control. Badger (1999) declares the artist as "both a sadist and a masochist", who "inflicts a sense of suffering and degradation in order to suggest his own suffering and degradation" (p. 141). At the same time, Badger deems him a revolutionary whose exhibition of perversity is a means to promote sexual liberation and reformation. He employs Carter's notion of a "moral pornographer" to describe Witkin; he is an artist who strives for the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work" (Carter, 1978 as cited in Badger, 1999, p. 136). In Townsend's BBC documentary entitled *Vile Bodies* (Townsend, 1998), the renowned photographic critic, Coleman, plainly notes the ethical dilemmas provoked about whether, why and how we should care for dead bodies.[2]

Some insist that it is Witkin's artistry that gives his photographs the power for moral revelation. For Millett (2008), his works may indeed be reminiscent of the medical photographs of the nineteenth century, through which science created images of "pathology and deviance, both corporeal and moral, against which mainstream society could assure its own normality" and "eclipse the multidimensional nature of disabled subjects, constructing disability as social spectacle" (p. 17). She insightfully acknowledges that it is this photographer's carnivalesque *design* that simultaneously parades and celebrates the 'abnormal' body. Peres (2013) also bears the visual acumen to note that he "gives form to photography's power to confront taboos" through the use of "dark mythological imagery" and through the quality created by "black and white prints, toned, bleached, containing scratches … coated with wax overlays" (p. 294). Additionally, Seward (1993) points to the way in which the visual quality of his "banquets" of death and dismemberment enables the viewer to engage in an "extreme form of multiculturalism, a respect for what is drastically foreign to you, even terrifying", proposing to explain this mechanism through a

[2] The script of the series is written in an accompanying book entitled *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (Townsend, 1998).

reference to its "elegance" (p. 108). However, sustained excavation of the mechanics of this language is not pursued. Further, a spiritual *gravitas* seems to be missing in such interpretations. Witkin's style not only humanises that which is taboo but *hallows* it. Seward captures this in his description of Witkin as holy as Saint Francis of Assisi, who confronted the aversive for spiritual growth, "drank the pus of lepers in order to overcome his repulsion of them" (p.108).

Other arguments assert that Witkin's juxtaposition of morally bad subject matter and Christian references make his work sacrilegious. This "mixing of [so-called] sacred and profane" (Regan, 2001, para. 1) is viewed by fundamentalists as violating the perfect goodness of the Christian God. One source of concern is his series *Contemporary Images of Christ*, in Witkin incarnates Christ, for example, in a masked nude boy placed perversely between his mother legs, or "a homosexual who wears Japanese World War II kamikaze flyer's goggles and a woman's spiked high-heel shoes" (Coke, 1985, p. 10).[3] For Heartney (2004), the artist displays "rage at the unjust God, who not only refuses to show himself but dispenses death and deformity …. By revelling in the monstrous and repulsive, Witkin mocks God's supposed mercy and challenges the promise of universal redemption." (Heartney, 2004, p. 34, as cited in Metaxatos, 2004, p. 56). Such interpretations misattribute moral badness to ethically neutral, ugly subject matter, thereby revealing a conflation that this thesis challenges.

This fallacy pervades other arguments that propose that the artist juxtaposes this 'offensive' (ugly) imagery as a means to reflect on the spiritual and moral *decline* of society at large, and not religious ideology itself. In her reading of the symbol of the 'spiritual body' in his work, Metaxatos references Chasseguet-Smirgel's *Creativity and Perversion* (1984). This text speaks to the "spiritual despair" emergent in artworks in the "decadent" dawning of the collapsing Roman Empire, the French Revolution and the birth of Nazism in an "anal sadistic universe" based on biblical sacrilege and abolition of differences (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1984 as cited in Metaxatos, 2004, p.12). Such transgressions include "dissolute sexual behaviour" as well as "confusion between the sexes and generations, including androgyny and maternal incest." Davis (1991) sees this reconstructed religious symbolism as a kind of end-of-Millennium bellwether for "the next, potentially apocalyptic world war" (p. 46).

[3] These refer to the two images of these series in Coke called *His Mother Mary: Photographed by an Anonymous Galilean Photographer* (1974) (Coke, 1984, p. 9) and *Ecce Homo* (1975).

In more nuanced analyses, Witkin's religious portrayals are an accurate visual expression of an essential quality of Catholicism. For example, Heartney, in her *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (2004), acknowledges his orientation towards "corporeal imagery" to a more "sensual and complex Catholic-Roman culture" (p. 33). Stevens (1995) describes him as alluding to "the sex-and-death-haunted spectacle of Catholicism" (p. 42). In one article in the *Tuscan Weekly*, Regan (2001) quotes the words of a letter to Witkin from an Italian priest:

> Your photographs (both crucifixions and pictures of the most rejected people) are … what best succeeds in getting into touch with the abyss of Christ's arcanum. Be compared with your artwork might only Francis Bacon's paintings or Picasso's *Crucifixion after Grunewald*. … We should pray before your photos (para. 2).

Still, such religious interpretations to do not demonstrate *how* this visionary communicates such messages. What is the *existing* point of view that Witkin wishes to subvert through a renewed artistic statement, and how do his visual mechanics achieve his alternative message? Surely there is also something that Witkin wishes to say in his referencing of the works of some of Western art's most iconic paintings? Some critics notice such gestures, but do not interpret them. Beyst (2006) glibly mocks his "simple paraphrasing" (para. 24) as a form of "pseudo-profound Witkinising" (para. 18); for Schjendahl (1995), it is a form of "coy pastiche" (p. 85). Yet, if critics were to execute a process of more detailed visual decoding (which includes the identification of the visuality of mystical and its interaction with representations of ugliness), then his work would be seen to participate in, and thereby uncover an already existing spiritual-aesthetic conversation that spans periods in art history. The meaning of the work is thus broader than a specific art historical period or religion, and more profound than its power to provoke.

There is a compelling rationale for such a study. If ugliness can be shown to be designated a spiritual role through art, it may act as evidence for the power of art to affect the meaning and widespread use of aesthetic terms. Indeed, the identification of ugliness with aesthetic badness is one of the obstacles to studying ugliness in the history of art. Actually, in building on the work of the renowned aesthetician Beardsley (1981), the contemporary aesthetic philosopher Zangwill (2001) emphasises that, whereas some aesthetic properties "substantively" describe qualities in an object, beauty and ugliness are different: as "evaluative aesthetic" terms, they are words that

perform judgements of good and bad value respectively (Beardsley 1981, p. 9; Zangwill, 2001, pp. 9-24). Furthermore, for Beardsley, substantive terms can be further naturally marshalled as a species of either the beautiful-good or ugly-bad. However, has ugliness' ill-worth been allocated? And if so, how? Beardsley goes on to point out that there are 'mediating variables', or intermediary reasons, for which this negative value has been ascribed to ugliness. Pop and Widrich (2014) acknowledge that there remains a persistent "haunting" question of whether this badness, "inherent" in ugliness, has been socially constructed, as opposed to being taken as a perceptible "sign" or "symptom" of something gone awry or insufficient, or of an ominous, imperceptible reality (p.7).

The realm of visual representation at large has certainly imbued ugliness with badness, and so high art is, too, a likely culprit. As Athanassoglou-Kallmyer (2003) puts it: "ugliness has become a marker of mundane reality, the irrational, evil, disorder, dissonance, irregularity, excess, deformity, and in short, the Other" (p. 281). Ugliness is rendered evermore 'bad' through cumulative re-use of it to signal social badness visually. It hereby becomes a political tool for segregation and control. Przybylo and Rodrigues (2018) make a case that it denotes inequalities and hierarchies, often serving as a repository of all that is 'other' (ability, race, gender, class, sexuality, body size, age, health, or animalism). It is also contingent and relational, taking shape through the comparison and evaluation of bodies. Eco's (2007) archival survey of ugliness is replete with historical examples of the way in which things that are bad are made ugly: the moralization of monsters, the Devil, the Anti-Christ, the witch, the merciless portrayal of the African and Asian, the horrors of lepers and plague victims and the caricature of peasants.

This permeability or malleability of the meaning of the term signals the potential for visual culture to have *amplified* or *compounded* ugliness' meaning to the extent that it has been stripped of having a substantive quality and texture of its own, only to be reduced to an ascription or judgement of badness altogether. On this account, ugliness is a rich quality; it has a fixed, substantive meaning, which remains constant, identifiable, and extricable from the contingent associations by which it is given worth. Thus, this can shed light on how ugliness' history of co-occurrence or co-existence with other forms of badness, particularly in the visual realm, has fixed it with this negative value. Has art itself paradoxically made the identification and study of ugliness in art impossible? In this study, the evaluative meaning of ugliness will be challenged, through revising its powers to

provide spiritual connection, vision and consciousness. From a theoretical perspective, the development of ways to identify the seemingly ineffable, and the attempt to execute and apply it to real examples, makes a small step to resolve a "trackless thicket" of theorising issued to attempt to resolve what the American philosopher Kelly calls the "aesthetic-art-art historical triangle" (Kelly, 2006, as cited in Elkins, 2006, p. 197). How might the ways that the artwork treats the aesthetic property over time, continually shift its meaning, more particularly, its badness? As Widrich and Pop (2014) insist:

> Besides for being current, ugliness is very much alive in the history of art: from ritual invocations of mythic monsters to the scare tactics of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, and from the cabinet of curiosities to the identity politics of today…. Studies are needed that formulate not just a unitary countertradition to the canon of beauty, but help us to understand why human beings possess an aesthetic term that seems to negate all they want from their objects and practices (p. 2).

It seems likely that Witkin's art-historical changes have not been seen to enter an already-existing visual conversation about the mystical place of ugliness, because there are powerful philosophical obstacles that obstruct easy identification of both the mystical and the ugly within works of art. These conceptual issues must be confronted in order to develop a framework with which to apprehend such qualities within the works that follow. Thus, **Chapter 1** poses a potential definition of mysticism and suggests that mystical experiences prevalent in specific religious contexts can be seen to express themselves through features of the corresponding art historical style, in what it formulates as a "mystical style". It also addresses two significant misconceptions or ill-definitions of ugliness that emerge in aesthetic philosophy, and that hinder our ability to identify it in works of art. This semantic fine-tuning includes clarifying the thesis by defining our sense of ugliness as a complex, substantive quality (which the thesis calls the "ugly aesthetic". This is differentiated from verdictive use of ugliness ("aesthetically ugly") to make a judgement of badness. It also requires coming to terms with the commonsense idea that aesthetic qualities are not identifiable or worth studying as individualistic, private and subjective "perceptive-felt" experiences of objects.

This initial philosophical work lays the foundations for the pursuit of psychological project of expounding the particular perceptive and felt characteristics that come together when we describe our experience of objects as ugly. These descriptions of experiences of ugly objects in the world, in turn, act as a basis with which to develop ways in which the existence of ugliness in the works

of art that follow can be identified, so that we may appreciate Witkin's work through such a lens. By integrating textual descriptions of ugliness with theories of the psychoanalytic pre-symbolic, **Chapter 2** provides a means for the identification of the three forms of ugliness that interact with mystical invocations in the comparison of the artworks that follow. These include the perceptual signs to identify representations of ugly objects, features by which to identify an imaginary ugly locus given by what is called the "geomorphological metaphor", and a list of ugly feelings that may be expressed in the formal qualities of artworks.

In **Chapter 3,** we show how Witkin subverts the negated role of ugliness in the Renaissance mystical style, through changes that place it as alternatively central. Through an in-depth analysis of *Leda and the Swan* (da Sesto, 1510-1515), and *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485), it evinces the way in which features of the mystical style of Platonic Idealism mimic the Christian Platonic mystical experience of perceiving a transcendent heaven of idealised forms, which ugliness cannot inhabit. By using the geomorphological image to change the environment to the pre-symbolic mental 'home' of ugliness, and by *photographing* objects with the perceptual markers of ugliness (which maintains and enhances their ugliness), Witkin makes the necessary changes to present his ugly mysticism in the remakes of *Leda, Los Angeles* (Witkin, 1986) and *Gods and Earth and Heaven, Los Angeles* (Witkin, 1988).[4]

Chapter 4 attempts to evidence how Witkin's style can also be read as an extension of the merely instrumental role assigned to ugliness as a trigger in *felt* mystical experiences of the Catholic (Italian) and Protestant (Flemish) Baroque, to one in which ugliness feelings of these very objects are the mystical experiences themselves. Through an in-depth examination of the work of *Het Pelsken (Little Fur)* (Rubens, 1638) and the Protestant Baroque period's *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (van Steenwyck, 1646), it shows the way in which both of these styles insert non-ugly mystical 'feeling states' into a seemingly-realistic earthly scene, in which God is immanent. The formal elements of the characteristic style of his revisions, *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment, San Francisco* (Witkin, 1984), and his *Feast Fools, Mexico City* (Witkin, 1990), will be shown to embody the networks of characteristic ugly sensation identified through its pre-

[4] For the rest of the thesis, the titles of Witkin's works will not include the city name. Witkin includes such locations as a form of subtitle.

symbolic in Chapter 1. They thus make the necessary changes to overturn the Baroque period's diminishment of the ugly feelings in its mysticism.

If such an analysis can evidence that Witkin presents a compelling case for the Godliness of ugliness, then it thereby illuminates the power of art as a remediating aesthetic educational space: a microcosm for 'aesthetic training', an opportunity for more refined attunement of aesthetic sensibility thereby bearing the possibility of correcting the impact of its own history. An art-historical study of ugliness illuminates how art-history itself has been constructed based on aesthetic decisions. Since the aesthetic is larger than the artistic, these psycho-educational spaces have impacted aesthetic history itself. It is aesthetic art that can bequeath the aesthetic skills that may be transferred by the spectator into his encounter with the aesthetic perception of the *Lebenswelt*.

The title of this thesis, *On Rearing an Ugly Head*, draws on the double meaning of the word "rear". According to the first meaning, the mystical essence of the ugly experience will be said to lie in its disclosing or surfacing of the otherwise hidden realities of a higher, Godly, perceptual-felt order. According to the second meaning, Witkin's artworks cultivate, nurture and breed an awakening to what will be shown to be a revelatory potential of ugliness. It is within art, and the history of art, that such aesthetic education is acquired. These artworks thereby afford access to an otherwise undisclosed gateway to the Godly.

CHAPTER 1

THE UGLY MYSTICAL: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGES

"When a point about a poem or a musical performance is made; the concept of beauty is in the background" (Mothersill, 1984, p. 257).

In his reflections on his work, the artist Joel-Peter Witkin writes: "I revolt against the mystical in order not to be overwhelmed and won over by it. It is unfathomable, yet I attempt to understand it. It is invisible, yet I try to objectify it, hoping to find revelation and truth" (Witkin, 1985, p. 184). The origins of this artist's expressed desire to use the "sacred vessel" of photography to access and manifest a personal vision of the Almighty, are found in his story about a disappointing visit to the dusty study of a dozy Rabbi who alleged to have "seen God" (Celant, 1995, p. 52). The artist claims this event propelled his quest to find his own notion of the mystical; to develop a "personal spirituality" outside traditionally religious mystical ideas (Peres, 2013, p. 294). Through an examination of paintings of two art-historical styles that this artist references, this thesis argues that Witkin's reconstructions of quintessential art-historical paintings are an expression of this very spiritual rebellion. More precisely, they can be read as a visual subversion of the diminishment of the role of ugliness in experiences of God, in favour of the artist's idea that it is ugliness that can, rather, act as the source of this sought revelation and truth.[5]

It is not surprising that the artist's work has not been read in this way, for the prospect of both identifying experiences of Godliness and of ugliness is plagued with notorious philosophical obstacles that we cannot overlook. How might an artist represent an experience of ineffable, invisible Godliness in a work of art? How can we agree on the presence of ugliness in these works of art, and legitimise our interpretation of these artworks, if ugliness is simply an individualistic judgement of aesthetic worth? The weight of such questions means that this thesis faces the task of tackling some notorious theoretical obstacles in order to offer a framework that we can apply to a study of the artworks that follow. The development of these formulations involves developing a

[5] Geomorphological mysticism – or mysticism of the ugly – is an encounter with ultimate truth of formlessness, ontological mysteriousness and monism of Godly reality. When it is called "geomorphological mysticism" we are referring to the perceptual components of ugly, in which we may find God. The felt qualities of ugliness, however, may also be seen as responses to features to Godliness (as is evident in the felt language of Witkin's work).

notion of a 'mystical style'. It also requires a carving out a sense of ugliness as a substantive perceptive-felt experience that we can more easily apprehend in the artwork that holds it. This exercise demands an engagement with the central issues of aesthetic value, and aesthetic ontology. Both of these concerns are core inquires in the field of philosophical aesthetics.

The Mystical in the Artwork

The analysis of the works that follow will demonstrate that Witkin presents a visual argument for ugliness as mystical by replacing the representation of specific kinds of mystical experiences presented in these original artworks, with qualities of ugliness. However, what is mysticism, and how does it appear in the works of art be analysed? The establishment of an exhaustive definition is challenging. The contemporary theological philosopher, Gellman (2017), provides an authoritative characterisation, outlining subtypes and variations of this phenomenon. According to him, an experience is mystical if it is a (purportedly) "super sense-perceptual or sub-sense-perceptual unitive experience granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection" (para. 4).[6]

When experiences are mystical in this "wide sense", there is an awareness of something "extra" that one witnesses in the apprehension of the world of objects; some dimension to the experience that cannot be a response to mere physical reality, and therefore the phenomenon we witness is inexplicable through the laws of science (Gellman, 2017, para. 4). Witkin (1985) refers to the mystical as "invisible" and "unfathomable" (p. 184).[7] There are two forms that this can take. In a "super sense perceptual" experience, the mystical perceives something that is not appropriate to ordinary sensing of the world outside; of the internal body (the somatosensory feeling of temperature, pain or the place of limb) or to thinking. When visiting the Rabbi, for example, the young photographer expected to encounter events that could only appear in the small New York

[6] Gellman (2017) explains: "The inclusion of 'purportedly' is to allow the definition to be accepted without acknowledging that mystics ever really do experience realities or states of affairs in the way described" (para. 7). In doing so, he does not subscribe to the truth that God exists, or that contact with God is actually possible.

[7] In this case, if the definition of an aesthetic experience, is a perceptual "felt" experience that cannot be explained by a formula in an object, then all aesthetic experiences are extra-sensory and therefore mystical.

room supernaturally; "flooded with light, angels, and suns…rainbows and constellations with the Rabbi standing, shining and larger than a mountain. His voice would be of thunder; and he would be of thunder" (Celant, 1995, p. 50).

A sub sense-perceptual experience is an alternative, second form of mystical experience, which is crucial for a mystical understanding of ugliness. This phenomenon is a "pure consciousness" event: one in which the person experiences *no* sense perception, or one in which there is the "phenomenological content appropriate to sense perception but lacking in the conceptualisation typical of attentive sense perception" (para. 51).[8] In this case, Witkin's mystical experience of the Rabbi may have involved a meditative non-conceptual state, in which Witkin may have accessed the 'essence', 'thisness' or reality of the Rabbi and his desk by escaping his idea of them as a "rabbi" or "desk", for example, as occurs in the Buddhist state of *tathata*. This transcendence refers to the experience of an object-less reality; perhaps when the entity of an object-unit disappears, and there is no distinction between the table or the Rabbi as individual things or types of things. It can be seen as a sub-type of super-sensory experience, when, according to Gellman, the quality of physical "beyondness" is, indeed, the very *non*-conceptual nature of the object (Gellman, 2017, para. 15). Gellman (2017) focuses on those mystical experiences that are "unitive". These include "phenomenological de-emphasis, blurring, or eradication of multiplicity" in the perception of individual things, for example, in an experience of union with the nature of God. He also acknowledges non-unitive, "numinous" experiences where reality feels "wholly other" (para. 18). The difference between "extroverted" non-conceptual experiences *of* the perceptual (unity in the world) and introverted experiences as those devoid of objects or perceptual content altogether (no-thing-ness) is also pertinent to ugliness (para. 6).[9]

Following Kant's (2000b) metaphysics, Gellman (2017) argues that this ordinary, "phenomenal" apprehension – this experience we ordinarily have of mere physical reality, is actually an *illusionary* or a *limited* view of reality. The mystical experience enables the/some surpassing of this restricted apprehension to an encounter with the "noumenal" truths outside of human sense

[8] Gellman (2017) gives the example of Buddhist philosopher Paramaartha (499–569), who writes of the non-cognitive, non-sensory Buddhist experience of emptiness, and the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, who describes a type of conceptual and sensory "forgetting", as consequent "sinking" into a "mystical oblivion" (para. 51).
[9] Gellman borrows this distinction from Walter D. Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1961).

perception – the world 'in itself'.[10] Although this theological philosopher insists that mystical experiences are not necessarily linked to experiences of God, or "religious" experiences, this thesis will focus on varieties of mysticism that are, by definition, "theistic" experiences of *God* as the "ultimate truth" or "spiritual" reality (Gellman, para. 25). God, as Scruton (2004a) puts it, is "immanent within the world [of human beings], but he also transcends it" (p. 121) A mystical experience as an experience of God, which, in part, is an experience of his very apartness (transcendent, supra).[11] Here, some of the qualities of theistic mystical experiences of human beings are seen to be logical responses to some of the properties of (the concepts of) God, for example, fear or awe of his omnipotence. [12]

Thus, if a mystical experience has some other extra-sensory quality that one apprehends in a circumstance – that gives a 'taste' of a dimension of Godly presence – then how are these experiences represented in a realm of an artwork? We need to be able to see how the paintings of the Renaissance and Baroque depict their unique forms of mystical experience, in order to evince Witkin's substitution of them with qualities of ugliness.

The thesis attempts to demonstrate that mystical experiences that it finds in the religious literature of the studied art historical periods are expressed through some of the visual elements that are characteristic to those corresponding art-historical styles. They can be said to form unique substyles called 'mystical styles', to each of which this thesis gives its own, distinctive name.[13] The thesis explores types of mystical experiences and corresponding kinds of mystical visual strategies in the chapters that follow. What this thesis names the mysticism of "Platonic Idealism" of the Renaissance that appears in *Leda and the Swan* (da Sesto, 1515-1510) and *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485), can be characterised as Gellman's (2017) super-sensory perceptive

[10] This distinction appears in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 2000b, pp. 338-365).
[11] The "immanent-transcendent distinction" is widely contested in the philosophical literature. See Westpahl's entry in the *Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Thought* (Westpahl, 2019, pp. 111-112).
[12] For Gellman, (the concept of) God contains the property of infinitude, which means He has *all* properties, or an "inexhaustible fullness" or "plenitude" (para. 80). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, a search for representations of Godly experience instead of God per se, helps the thesis to avoid problems such as iconoclasm or anthropomorphism. Osbourne (1986) writes: "by the beginning of the eighth century the veneration of images had reached its climax and reaction set in. Led by the Iconoclasts or Image-breakers, the attack of the cult of images become an attack of images themselves. Their central tenant was that images of sacred personages must be removed from the churches and places of worship since their presence there inevitably became an occasion of idolatry" (p. 554).
[13] According to Gombrich (1978), "style consists of those features of the symbolic functioning of a work that are characteristic of author, period, place, or school" (p. 35).

mystical experience This is evoked by the artist by creating a 'vision' of a fantastical transcendent otherworld and its objects in which God is thought to dwell. This mystical idea lies in contrast to what this thesis names the "Theatrical Realism" of the Catholic Baroque that appears in *Little Fur* (Rubens, 1638). It is, from the perspective of this thesis, also different from the "Mindful *Vanitas*" style that appears in the style of the Protestant Baroque period's van Steenwyck's *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (van Steenwyck, 1646). In the reading given here, this style presents a form of "felt" (somatosensory but not perceptual) mystical experiences of the Godly immanent from ordinary perceiving of this world. This type is not addressed directly by Gellman.

In each of these styles, how these mystical qualities interact with the presence of ugliness acts as a source of information about the role the religious and art-historical context gives ugliness within these prescribed experiences of God. In a close reading of the artworks presented for discussion, this status is more technically referred to by this thesis as the visual "ugly-mystical relation." Witkin's replacement of these mystical styles with qualities of the ugly aesthetic, then, is what signals his point of view that mystical experiences arise in those ugly objects themselves. This idea follows a tradition of features of aesthetic experiences that have often been linked to the mystical, such as beauty and the sublime.[14] Ugliness is unique in that it is – or leads to – a sub-sensory experience. Also, as conveyed in section on the ontology of ugliness below, ugliness is a type of aesthetic experience, and an aesthetic experience is a "perceptive-felt" experience. The idea that such qualities seem as if they emanate from somewhere else other than the mere physical, deems them "sacred". As Scruton (2014) writes, they offer "a passage between the immediate and the

[14] For example, Freud's feelings of excitement, awe, veneration and enthrallment that go with experience of the idealised (loved) object in his *On Narcissism* (2014), are also seen to characterise the experience of beauty, and are thought to emerge from God as the ultimate idealised object (Hagman, 2005, p. 42). Hagman references Freud's process of 'idealisation' in his *On Narcissism* (1914) and his *The Ego and the Id* (1923), where they are discussed in relation to the creation of a child's "ego-ideal". According to Freud, in early development, the child projects ideas of omnipotence onto the mother and then "merges" with her, and then projects the image later as his "protecting parents". The process of separation involves internalising this image in creating an ideal image of the self, and narcissism. See also the Enlightenment philosopher Burke's (2015) work on the sublime. For the Lutheran theologian Otto, in his *The Idea of the Holy* (1958), the sublime's fear, awe, humility (*tremendum)* as well as intrigue (*fascinans*) is a proper super sensuous response to an object that is "wholly other" – deeply mysterious and therefore overwhelmingly powerful (Otto, 1958, pp. 5-31). More precisely, For Otto, *tremendum* includes the elements of awfulness, and overpowering energy (pp. 12-23) and *fascinans* ("fascinating") includes the elements of the "wholly other" and "mysteriousness" (pp. 25-31).

transcendental … they seem to stand at the horizon of our world, looking out to that which is not of this world … so as to meet us face-to-face" (p. 15).

Following this reasoning, an ugly mystical style must technically make the artwork both look and feel ugly.[15] However, the ugly "perceptive" and "felt" dimensions of Witkin's style will be analysed separately in this study. This division makes sense because, for Witkin to present ugliness as an alternative experience in the Renaissance, the thesis must demonstrate that his style overturns the perceptual qualities of this visionary mystical experience and concomitant perceptive mystical style. In the Baroque, the thesis must show his style to substitute in a mystical feeling language in order to enter the debate.

The "Aesthetically Ugly" Versus the "Ugly Aesthetic": A Case for a Substantive Perceptive-Felt Account

If we are to examine how Witkin replaces the elements of these mystical styles with qualities of ugliness in order to advocate for ugliness' centrality in experiences of the Godly, then we need to be able to similarly find a way to identify this ugliness in the works that follow. Actually, Witkin renders ugliness in three ways in art-making, which must be made detectable. These include ugly perceptual qualities and signs of ugly place (to substitute the idealised objects rendered in Renaissance visions of heaven), and ugly feelings that take the place of the other forms of mystical feeling in the Baroque. Here, however, we are confronted with the intellectual gravitas of a history of philosophical puzzles. The first is the problem of judgement: how can we identify a quality of ugliness in the artworks when ugliness merely means that something is bad? If we can make a case for ugliness as a particular and unique type of experience and not a casting of a personal verdict, then we are still left with the second conundrum of having to find objective criteria that make Witkin's changes bear widespread appeal and interest.

Two questions ensue. First, from a semantic perspective, is there a way in which we use ugliness, apart from passing aesthetic judgement? In contrast to the "aesthetically ugly", the term "ugly aesthetic" is introduced as a term that *describes* some quality that is to be specified. However, this then requires an examination of the ontology of this quality itself. What kind of thing is the "ugly

[15] It must be reiterated that perception involves the visual in our analysis, but that it incorporates all sensory modalities. There can be ugly smells, textures, sounds or tastes.

aesthetic" a variety of, and how do we make this accessible to a third party? This definitional work is the basis upon which to develop accounts of the artwork's ugly objects, formal feeling qualities and environment.

Ostensibly, critics have not defined either the subject matter nor the formal qualities of Witkin's photographs as being 'ugly', because of a pre-dominant definition of the ugly as that which bears aesthetic 'ill-worth' or 'bad' taste.[16] Regarding Witkin's subject matter— referring to his use of marginalised subjects or body parts as 'ugly' for example – feels inaccurate and offensive. Instead, as has been evidenced in the aforementioned review of the literature, richer and more sophisticated descriptions such as the "gothic" (Adams, 1991) or "carnivalesque" (Coke, 1985), are ostensibly more apt for his artistic statement. Further, as critics have agreed, Witkin's formal and technical mastery of the photographic processes are "skillful" and have great merit, which elicits the use of the term "beautiful" to describe the artwork as a whole (Mullarkey, 1987; Seward, 1993; Wilson, 2000). This thesis uses the term "aesthetically ugly" in order to differentiate this common understanding of the term from the less understood "ugly aesthetic", in which ugliness conveys an experience of a quality of/in an object.

The distinction between "evaluative" and "substantive" aesthetic terms is an insight that is first offered by Beardsley (1982) and explored at length by the contemporary philosophers Levinson (2005, p. 327), and by Zangwill, in a chapter entitled *The Beautiful, The Dainty and the Dumpy* (2001, pp. 9-24). Zangwill (2001) explains that, in a "performative" sense, the words 'beautiful' and 'ugly' can cast a "verdict" on the aesthetic merit of an object (p. 19).[17] Semantically, when aesthetic terms serve this function, they operate as terms within the broader practice of "evaluative aesthetics". We find the example of aesthetics as an act of coming to a judgement or verdict of 'taste', in Hume's seminal eighteenth-century text, *Standard of Taste* (2006).[18] On this account, to say something is 'beautiful' is to deem it aesthetically good or

[16] Ugly objects can be classified as subject matter, while ugly feelings are expressed through the formal qualities of the work.
[17] According to Austin (1962), performative words do not only describe reality but are speech acts that change reality by executing the very action referred to in the utterance e.g. "I promise".
[18] Here, Hume (2006) posits the existence of a "taste organ" that he describes as 'judging' the 'verdict' of a work of art. He describes the seasoned critic as having a "[s]trong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, [that] can alone entitle critics to this valuable character" (p. 355).

"aesthetic", since being called aesthetic at all is made synonymous with being taken as beautiful. On the contrary, when one deems something 'ugly', one is saying that it is "aesthetically bad", or "un-aesthetic", where the prefix, "un-" denotes the opposite or reverse.[19] Indeed, within the domain of evaluative aesthetics, all seemingly substantive, complex, or "thick" aesthetic terms, some of which are used in relation to Witkin's work ('grotesque', 'Gothic' or 'surreal') or others (such as 'elegant', 'dull', 'cumbersome' or 'cutesy') have these good or bad evaluations built into their meaning which marshals them as species of the beautiful or ugly (Zangwill, p. 15).[20] In the realm of evaluative aesthetics, it seems, this judgmental function of aesthetic terms dominates: following Beardsley (1982), it appears impossible to engage neutrally and non-judgmentally in aesthetic descriptions.

There are several unsettling consequences of the notion of the "aesthetically ugly". Firstly, there are conceptual problems that emerge from this binary relation – if we solely reduce beauty and ugliness to these good/bad values, then ugliness is rendered as the pure opposite of beauty. Consequently, the two terms become mutually exclusive. For Lorand (1994), who does not concur with Beardsley's beauty-ugly species argument, this polarised relation awkwardly relegates all other unique aesthetic properties, other than beauty (e.g. meaningless, kitsch, boring), to the non-beautiful ugly . This is called the "aesthetic pluralism" argument. What about the possibility of a thing being 'an-aesthetic' or 'non-aesthetic', and therefore neither beautiful nor ugly?[21] Take, for

[19] The problem of rendering ugliness as the only opposite of beauty on the binary account above, is clarified in the verdictive account. If beauty is conflated with the 'aesthetic', the opposite of beauty is both ugliness and the non-aesthetic. It feels unintuitive to suggest that the meaning of the term ugliness, and the term un-aesthetic (or anaesthetic[sic]) are synonymous.

[20] The term "thick concept" was first introduced by Bernard Williams in his 1985 book, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. It was borrowed by Geertz (1973) in his notion of thick description – the anthropologist's tool for describing "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another" (p. 10). A 'thick' ethical concept is a subcategory of an evaluative concept such as dogmatic, which contains a judgement and description simultaneously. For Zangwill (2001), "this parallels the issue in moral philosophy about so called 'thick' descriptions such as 'courageous' or 'honest'… it is part of the meaning of the our judgement that we also praise it… there is an issue about whether or not we can in principle separate the evaluative component from a purely descriptive component" (p. 15). One solution is to determine the evaluative content based on the "linguistic utterance", for evaluation is "conversationally implied" (pp. 15-16).

[21] In his *Kalliphobia in Contemporary Art* (2004) the American aesthetic philosopher Danto refers to a point made in his 1964 article entitled *The Artworld* and reflected upon in his *Abuse of Beauty* (2003). His point is that aesthetic properties do not determine artistic status. In his famous "Brillo Box" experiment, he argues that there is no perceptual (and therefore aesthetic) difference between the Brillo boxes shown in the gallery, and those found in the supermarket (Danto, 2003, p.4). In so doing, he suggests that the aesthetic properties of an artwork do not determine whether is an artwork—are not a sufficient condition.

example, the number, or mathematical object, '3'?[22] Moore (2014) also raises the problem of "callilogical neutrality" (para. 5), proposing that things are beautiful or ugly in *different degrees* and that some things may be neutral. There is an emptiness or thinness that transpires if we keep the aesthetically bad as ugliness' sole definition. On the evaluative account, a description of the intersex person in Witkin's photograph as being ugly, can simplistically be made equivalent to a description of that object being un-beautiful. This problem is highlighted by the sense that we do not always feel beauty and ugliness to be inversely proportionate: the statement "Witkin's work possesses as much ugliness as can be" cannot be equivalent to saying "Witkin's work possesses as little beauty as can be." [23]

There is a second objection that we can make to the evaluative basis of this relation. One notorious problem that may obstruct the identification of ugliness in Witkin's work is the idea, engrained by Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (2000), of this verdict of aesthetic badness as epistemologically subjective and therefore individualistic and therefore "groundless" (Scruton, 2004c, p. 448). This problem seems to make it impossible to obtain objectively verifiable consensus for a legitimate scholarly analysis or a worthwhile or convincing art-historical comparison – universal agreement.[24] This permissibility for the individual to make up his mind, implies that the truth of

[22] This point that aesthetic properties depend on perceptual ones is debatable. For example, Shelley (2003) argues that aesthetic properties can depend, too, on the affect of the conceptual: "[T]houghts can move us perhaps as much as sensuous forms do. They strike us with daring wit and beauty" (p. 373).

[23] There seem to be commonly shared features by which we come to easily identify all ugliness' subtypes, that have more to do with a "badness". Indeed, there is a question about the basis upon which we identify these aesthetic qualities as "bad". Perhaps, following Wittgenstein (2009), the substantive forms of ugliness bear a "family resemblance", that an account of the "ugly aesthetic" can begin to illuminate: "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" (p. 66). In his review of the concept of ugliness, the contemporary philosopher Moore (2014) attempts to detail and categorise the history of philosophical notions of ugliness according to their relation to beauty. Along with the binary account– that he shows to be prominent in Classical and Medieval accounts – he acknowledges a "privation" category of St Augustine, Bosenquat or perception theorists like Bullough (1912) or Dickie (1964) (in which ugliness is claimed to be a misperception of actually occurring beauty), and an "incorporative category" in Croce or Rosenkranz (whereby the ugliness is superficially described as 'some' ingredient in beauty). The recurring problem is that we still need to understand the use or meaning of this independent concept of ugliness there in the first place.

[24] Kant introduces a famous paradox in his Antinomy of Taste, in which he argues that despite the immediacy and subjectivity of aesthetic judgements, there must exist a universal *sensus communis* (see Scruton, 1994c, pp. 448-449). In Elkin's record of a conversation between aesthetic philosophers and art-historians at a conference in 2004 called "Rediscovering Aesthetics", the Modernist art theorist, de Duve (2006) gets to the purpose of Kant's theory: "In making aesthetic judgments, we merely suppose that *sensus communis* exists, as a universally shared capacity for sharing feelings i.e. for agreeing by a dint of feeling … Kant's *Critique of Judgment formulates* a transcendental – I say transcendental, not utopian or anything like that – foundation for democracy and peace on earth [*good-natured laughter*]" (as cited in Elkins, 2006, p. 64).

aesthetic statements is relative to the subject. In the artist's work entitled *Anna Akhmatova* (1998), for example, a severed arm, which is posed to hold onto a wood-encased clock in a still life with grapes, might be simultaneously beautiful *for him* and ugly *for her*. No basis for such a decision need be provided. Also, as was mentioned earlier, the reduction of the meaning of ugliness to aesthetic badness has the potential to be conflated with that which has less value in general, so that so-called aesthetic badness becomes intertwined with the morally or ethically bad. The aesthetic, which really belongs to the world of 'appearance', leaks onto the socio-political and confers the segregation that is the logic of this binary relation. The aesthetic imparts a "visual injustice" to the world at large (Przybylo & Rodrigues, 2018, p. 3).

These ideas provide evidence that we mean more when we use the term ugliness. The point is that we rely on the concept of ugliness. It contains some meaningful description of the world, or of our experience of the world, that we wish to share because we intuit it has collective understanding.[25] It is just not the same as the un-beautiful, in the same way that white cannot be captured in non-blackness. The reason is that ugliness points to an independent quality in the world and does not only note the absence of beauty. In her work on ugliness in nature, Brady (2010) restates this point, "… it can be maintained that ugliness exists independently of other kinds of aesthetic value and disvalue. This needs teasing out." (pp. 32-33). After archiving the history of the concept of ugliness, Wilson (1942) also concludes that there is a "need for including the problem as a positive part of aesthetic theory rather than treating it negatively, or not at all, as the case has been so often" (p. ii).[26]

[25] This assertion is inspired by Wittgenstein's "private language argument" in his *Philosophical Investigations* (2009), in which he tackled the dominant idea of the "privacy" and unverifiability of the phenomenological (as is discussed below in the section on ontology) (pp. 181-265). Hacker (2005), explains that Wittgenstein argued that "language is misrepresented as a vehicle for the communication of language-independent thoughts. Speaking is not a matter of translating wordless thoughts into language, and understanding is not a matter of interpreting – transforming dead signs into living thoughts. The limits of thought are determined by the limits of the expression of thoughts …. A dog can want a bone, but only a language user can now want something next week." (Hacker, 2005, p. 962). This independent word indicates the presence of an unearthed concept we need for use in the world; a concept which may have been cultivated by that outside world itself as in the aesthetically ugly.

[26] Wilson's (1942) conclusion holds weight because of his extensive and comprehensive chronological analysis of ugliness, from for example, Socrates to Plato (pp. 1-6), Aristotle (pp. 6-8), Plutarch (pp. 9-11), Plotinus (pp. 11-13), Augustine (pp. 14-19), Burke (pp. 19-21), Kant (pp. 24-29), Schiller (pp. 26-29), Schelling (pp. 29-34), Hegel and Schopenhauer (pp. 34-35), Schlegel (p. 35), Rosenkranz (pp. 42-48), Nietzsche (pp. 48-51), Bozenquat, Dewey (pp. 56-58), Santayana (p. 64) Whitehead (pp. 64-66) and Croce (p. 66), to contemporary theorists such as Dewitt Parker (pp. 71-73).

These loopholes in the evaluative account propel an investigation of this independent 'quality' of ugliness: this is the type of ugliness that is found in Witkin's works and those he references. These conceptual snags validate that we need to develop an additional meaning that rests upon the alternative meaning of the aesthetic itself formulated by this thesis as "that which is perceived-felt". This definition relies on the insight that, apart from their verdictive function, aesthetic terms can also operate in the realm of "substantive aesthetics", where they are names for varieties of aesthetic qualities. In "substantive aesthetics", 'aesthetic' is a noun, that can be qualified by an adjective describing *any* type of aesthetic quality, for example, a kitsch aesthetic or a delicate aesthetic. In other words, beauty is but one – out of a manifold of – ways of being aesthetic (the 'beautiful' aesthetic). The "ugly aesthetic" operates within this field of meaning. Such properties are "thick" and complex, such that they cannot be facilely cast as opposites (Lopes, 2008, p. 129).[27]

However, we need not close off the prospect of aesthetic evaluation altogether. The beautiful/ugly aesthetic can act as *the basis for* determining whether these substantive qualities are aesthetically beautiful/good or aesthetically ugly/bad. This potential interaction may forge an intriguing relation between substantive and evaluative meanings. Beardsley (1982) argues that an aesthetic quality is "one that can be independently cited as a ground of aesthetic value" (as cited in Budd, 2008, p. 18). In fact, Witkin's presentation of ugliness (an intersex dwarf, a dissected dead dog or obese beheaded prisoner) as a site or entry point into experiences/feature(s) of the God, mean that photographs 'rear' us to value these experiences for this 'secondary' or 'mediating' mystical reason.[28] This sharpening of the meaning and revaluation of aesthetic terms throws into question our assumptions about beauty's inherent/taken-for-granted goodness. In his

[27] For more debates regarding "aesthetic pluralism" see Lopes, 2008, p. 129). Lopes argues that Zangwill and Levinson believe that aesthetic concepts do not have to have an evaluative component, whereas Bonzon (2009, following Williams, 1985) argues that that aesthetic properties cannot pick out the "thick" non-evaluative features without making the evaluation. However, all "thick" concepts do have non-evaluative features, which means they are not perfect opposites.

[28] An intersex dwarf can be found in *Portrait of a Dwarf* (2006); a dissected, dead dog in *The Result of War: Cornucopian Dog, New Mexico* (1984), and the obese decapitated woman in *The Capitulation of France, New Mexico* (1982). For Zangwill (2001), within the aesthetic, verdictive properties depend on substantive properties in a relation of "determination" or "dependence" (p. 19). Further, if substantive aesthetic terms are also to have value judgements built into them, then the outlined substantive quality must provide what he calls a "reasonable justification" for that particular ascription of aesthetic value (Zangwill, 2001, p. 19). Zangwill criticises Beardsley for not differentiating between determining and reason-giving relation in his notion of "dependence". (pp. 21-37)

survey, *Beauty* (2009), Scruton explains that beauty is valued for its own sake (p. 2).[29] Danto (2003) concurs that "[b]eauty is but one of an immense range of aesthetic qualities, and philosophical aesthetics has been paralyzed by focusing as narrowly on beauty as it has. But beauty is the only one of the aesthetics qualities that is also a value, like truth and goodness" (p. 15). There is certainly a suspicion that there is some basis upon which beauty and ugliness have come to be conflated with goodness and badness respectively. Is the history of art's spiritual deflation of ugliness cause for suspicion?

The Ontology of Substantive Aesthetic Properties: The "Ugly Aesthetic" as a Perceptive-Felt Experience

In order to describe and identify this "ugly aesthetic", we have to define the realm of the substantive aesthetic in general. A definition of an aesthetic property provides the basis for a description of the character of the ugliness, for it is one variation of the aesthetic. In philosophical terms, this is the question an aesthetic property's 'ontology' or the nature of its existence. This is a fraught metaphysical/epistemological issue. Ugliness needs to be the sort of thing that we can commonly witness, and we need to evidence its existence in Witkin's work if this thesis is to make a convincing and appealing case for his treatment of it. To reiterate, the point of this chapter is to provide objective methods by which we can identify ugliness in the artworks that follow. Differentiating the descriptive use of ugliness from the verdictive use of it, means that such processes need not specify ways in which to come to agree on aesthetic badness, but must instead propose a method by which we can verify this *quality* as being in the object. The problem is that the intrinsically experiential nature of aesthetic properties poses a threat to achieving the third-person verifiability of a meaningful aesthetic study of artworks. Ideally, as Kant has yearned for, we would want to have a way on agreeing that Witkin's dwarf, dog or foetus are ugly, in the same way we have a way to agree on temperature through a Celsius reading on a thermometer.

[29] Scruton (2011) also refers to Beauty's inherent sanctity: "To speak of beauty is to enter another and more exalted realm – a realm sufficiently apart from our everyday concerns as to be mentioned only with a certain hesitation. People who are always in praise and pursuit of the beautiful are an embarrassment, like people who make a constant display of their religious faith. Somehow, we feel such things should be kept for our exalted moments, and not paraded in company, or allowed to spill out over dinner" (p. 11).

Scruton (2004c) insists that aesthetics is an interest in the phenomenal world: the "element of experiences seems to be essential" (p. 444).[30] This 'what-it-is-likeness' or 'qualia' of experience is sensed with immediacy by the subject in relation to an object:

> People have to *see* the grace and unity of a work, *hear* the plaintiveness or frenzy of the music, *notice* the gaudiness of a colour scheme, *feel* the power of a novel, its mood, its uncertainty of tone …. Merely to learn from others, on good authority, that the music is serene, the play moving, or the picture unbalanced, is of little aesthetic value; the crucial thing is to see, hear or feel (Sibley, 1965, p. 137)[31]

If the existence of ugliness is determined simply by the subject's having an experience of it, then this means that the truth of this experience is "immune to doubt": we know and are always right about having an ugly experience if we think we are. This is true in the same way that "if I think I am in pain, I know it." (Scruton, 2004b, p. 43).[32] So, this 'incorrigibility' of the ontologically subjective poses a problem in developing epistemological objectivity or a universal method by which to identify ugliness in the chosen artworks. If aesthetic experience is private and ineffable, then the outside observer cannot verify it – only surmise through observing behaviour. Here, describing something as ugly is a statement that is as personal and intimate as communication of sadness. For this reason, epistemic subjectivism is often coupled with 'relativism' in aesthetics (Cousins, 1994, p. 62). This folk aesthetic or philosophically 'naïve', colloquial 'beauty-is-in-the-

[30] Scruton (2004c) goes on to write: "You respond to the look of the landscape, the sound of the birdsong, and the feel of the wind against your face. The term 'aesthetic' derives from the Greek word for 'perception" (p. 444).

[31] A "qualia" is, for example, the way sugar tastes or the way vermillion looks, the very 'strawberiness' of the smell of a strawberry or the 'sandpaperiness' that is the essence of the tactile feel of sandpaper. More a more extensive discussion, see Tye (2018). It is important to recognize that this "perceptual" definition of the aesthetic given in this thesis is not water-tight or all-encompassing. As mentioned in relation to the "anaesthetic", Shelley (2003) has provided an objection to the solely perceptual nature of the aesthetic here by suggesting that thoughts can act as the basis of an aesthetic experience. Caroll (2004) has also provided an objection to this "direct" perception by arguing that aesthetic properties of, for example, John Cage's silent three-movement, *4'33*, can be grasped on the basis of reliable description. The fact that the perceptual is phenomenological and can only be grasped based on first-hand experience, means that the aesthetic cannot be reduced to the phenomenological, but may include the cognitive. (Carroll, 2004, pp. 416-417, as cited in Gero, 2006, p. 9).

[32] Shelley (2017) describes the "immediacy principle" as a reaction to the eighteenth-century approaches. He cites an early expression of the thesis, from Jean-Baptiste Dubos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music* (1748): "People taste the ragoo, and tho' unacquainted with those rules, they are able to tell…" (as cited in Shelley, 2017, para. 5) and Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (2000): "I will stop my ears, listen to no reasons and arguments, and would rather believe that those rules of the critics are false … than allow that my judgment should be determined by means of *a priori* grounds of proof, since it is supposed to be a judgment of taste and not of the understanding of reason." (Kant, 2000 as cited in Shelley, 2017, para. 8).

eye-of-the-beholder' myth is based on the idea that my experience of an ugly object is that which makes the ugliness exist.[33] What this means is that the statement, "The amputated arm in Witkin's *Anna Akmatova* is ugly" can only be made true *for me* while it is false *for you*. All in all, this situation would render the study of ugliness in this thesis as solipsistic.[34] In other words, it would seem redundant to write about one's experience of ugliness in these works of art, if this is simply an expression of my personal experience that may not be apprehended by others.

One tactic that has been used in order to try and create more objective, verifiable criteria for aesthetic properties (so that these experiences and descriptions are relevant to a third-person audience) is to negate our experience and to re-establish the identity of aesthetic qualities to be found in some formula in the object. This would achieve epistemological objectivism. The physicalist philosopher Putnam (1973), attempts to reduce the identity of water to its molecular structure of H_2O for the purposes of identification, as opposed to relying on our unreliable experience of it as translucent or drinkable. In the same way, aesthetic objectivism would seek some physical shared objective feature. Perhaps this might be a configuration of lines or proportion present in Witkin's dwarf, dog or foetus – that makes those things ugly irrespective of whether we feel it as ugly.[35] The truth resides in these verifiable facts in the same way that an apple's being red might be based on a certain presence of pigment.[36] We can thus link it to "aesthetic realism", which posits that aesthetic qualities exist out there in the world as mass does. They have nothing

[33] Although this is usually used in relation to verdictive aesthetic properties (as mentioned above in relation to Kant), it also applies to the subjective ontology and therefore subjective epistemology of substantive ones.

[34]Perhaps it could be said that more than one may find beauty in the same place. In other words, relativism (the notion of beauty being "in the eye of the beholder") does not preclude the possibility of consensus or agreement of beholders.

[35] These 'outside', mind-independent properties are Locke's "primary properties"—they are part of the thing itself and can be determined with certainty.

[36] This idea is based on Jackson's thought experiment *What Mary Didn't Know* (1986) about the super-scientist Mary, who has studied everything there is to know about red, and yet has never seen it, and hence, can be said to not comprehend its experiential essence. Kripke and Putnam are two theorists that form part of the physicalist project to classify physical things: to "carve nature at the joints" (Plato, Phaedrus, 265e), and to promote a 'semantic externalism' in which meaning is determined by variables outside of the speaker. For Kripke (2013), the experience we have of gold – its metallic, yellow colour and malleability – do not tell us whether the substance is true or fool's gold. These "accidental properties" may sometimes offer a kind of heuristic, but the proof of identity of the object lies in whether it can be identified as being atomic number 79 on the periodic table of elements, and this is its "real essence" (pp. 44-45). Putnam (1973) makes the differentiation between the 'phenomenal' and 'actual' concept through his *Twin Earth* thought experiment, where he emphasises the true identity of water as being H_2O.

to do with psychology and are not mind-dependent projections (Zemach, 1997).[37] Examples of aesthetic objectivism can be found throughout history, for example, when *beauty* is reduced to principles of proportion, harmony and symmetry, in the Pre-Socratic Ancient Greek philosophers such Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. These figures thought of the relationship between form and beauty (Eco, 2010, p. 61).[38]

However, why would the ugliness of an object matter to us in the first place if it were not an experience? We really need the word ugliness to express something about our *experience*, as opposed to sharing a fact about the object. Any 'aesthetic DNA test' is rendered futile: we only want to know if the amputated arm has the ingredients for ugliness because of its power to affect us experientially. Moreover, there cannot be any definitive law-like relation of physical properties in an object and an aesthetic quality – particularly ugliness. As of yet, there have only been attempts to find a recipe for beauty – this resurrects Lorand's (1994) concerns that any object that does not strictly conform with these criteria is rendered as first as a form of non-beauty – and on some accounts, as consequently ugly (even though there are many aesthetic qualities that diverge from the beautiful) (p. 4).[39] This re-enthrones beauty as the sole and ultimate type of aesthetic experience.[40]

[37] Zemach (1997) presents two arguments for aesthetic realism. Firstly, he refers to common core understandings of shared applications of the term beauty. Secondly, he notes the way in which science itself (premised on realism) employs aesthetic qualities of theoretical success, for example, simplicity or elegance.

[38] Mathematical consideration occurs in Plato's dialogue of the *Timeus* (53d-54b) of 360 BC: "Now of the two triangles, the isosceles has one form only; the scale or the unequal sided has an infinite number". It is continued in such texts as Euclid's *Elements*, in such works of architecture as the Parthenon, and, again, by the *Canon* of the sculptor Polykleitos (5 BCE). The physician Galen characterises the proportions of beauty as "the finger to the finger, and of all the fingers to the metacarpus, and the wrist, and of all these to the forearm, and of the forearm to the arm, in fact of everything to everything" (Galen, n.d. as cited in Pollitt, 1974, p.15). The most familiar proportion in art and architecture is the Golden Section, the "section aurea" of the Romans, as a line divided up in such a way that, at least according to Euclid, the area contained by the smaller section and whole, equals that of the square of the larger section (Eco, 2007, p. 66-67). More recently, Le Corbusier developed a system of proportions based on the human body in his *Modular* (1951), closely related to the Fibonacci sequence.

[39] Lorand (1994) mentions the instances of the meaningless, boring, kitsch and insignificant as qualities that are non-beautiful and also non-ugly.

[40] It must be acknowledged that besides for polarised categories of beauty and ugliness (non-beautiful), the 'sublime' features as a predominant aesthetic category. There is a question to be asked as to whether the 'sublime' acts as third category, or whether (following Zangwill's (2001) idea that all substantive aesthetic terms can be marshalled as either a *species of the* beautiful or ugly) it can be designated as a sub-type of the beautiful or ugly. Rooted in the experience of awe, which involves a two-toned experience of both pleasure and fear, the sublime presents a fascinating case or counterexample to Zangwill's idea. This thesis sets this problem aside for future in-depth consideration within a long history of discussions on the sublime. See Clewis (2018) and Ashfield and de Bolla (1996).

Ontological relativism poses another threat to objectivism. Pop (2014) argues that the same features of a thing may be deemed both beautiful and ugly. [41] This duality is because our aesthetic experience depends on how we typologically classify those objects.[42] The particular arm placed by Witkin in *Anna Akhmatova* (Witkin, 1998) may be ugly as an arm. However, whether it is an ugly amputated arm, human body part, living thing or thing in general, are, as Pop (2014) writes "further questions that need not yield affirmative answers" (p. 172).[43] This leads on to the more extreme problem of "particularism": it is impossible to find universal principles that (exhaustively) "link non-aesthetic properties to aesthetic ones in such a way that it is possible to infer from the presence of (a set of) non-aesthetic properties that there will be (a set of) aesthetic properties." (Schellekens, 2008, p. 161).[44] This is because concrete things 'wear' ugliness differently, so that rules are impossible: "the ugliness of this particular arm in *Anna Akhmatova*" (called UA1) (Fig. 1) is a different variation of aesthetic property to "the ugliness of the right arm of the dog in *The Result of War: The Cornucopian Dog*" (UA2) (Witkin, 1984) (Figure 2.). The dramatic tonality that renders harmoniousness in one of Joel-Peter Witkin's photographs, may generate chaos in another.[45]

[41] The specificity of the general identity of the object in determining the aesthetic quality of an object is taken into account in the perceptual part of the perceptual-felt equation.

[42] In Plato's *Hippias Major* (±390 BC), when his interlocutor, Socrates writes: "Heraclitus was right when he said that the most beautiful ape will be ugly when compared to human beings – and as the wise Hippias says, the most beautiful cooking pot will be ugly when compared with young maidens" (Plato, 1982 as cited in Pop, 2014, p. 171).

[43] Pop (2014) gives his own example: "A particular turbot I bought this morning may be beautiful as a turbot, but whether it is a beautiful fish, animal, living thing or thing in general are further questions that need not yield affirmative answers." (p. 176). One potential objection that Pop gives to this point is that that 'x' may be beautiful or ugly as *an object*. As Pop writes: "For, in asserting the turbot's participation in Beauty, we are saying it is beautiful "on the whole", "in general", "in comparison for a great many things" (p. 176).

[44] The debate between aesthetic generalists and particularists is indeed robust and unremitting. See Shelley (2017) for a comprehensive summary of the contributions (para. 32).

[45] Hume's (2006) separate special "taste organ" that detects aesthetic qualities (although for him this may simply refer to beauty), which is separate from sensory organs although both "pick" up their various qualities immediately. Humans have an almost "magical ability" to feel aesthetic "energies" without having to know formula, formula which that do not even exist (Maclagan, 2005, p. 73).

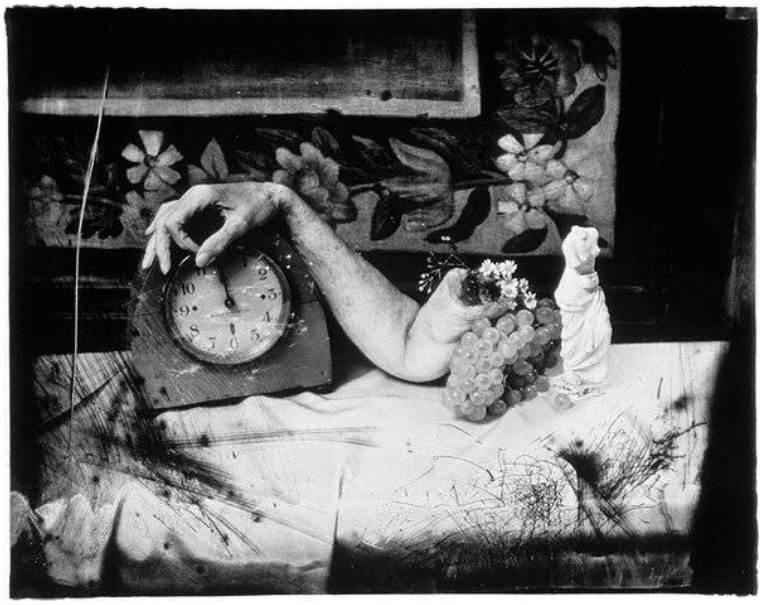

Figure 1. Witkin, *Anna Akhmatova*, 1998 (Chavez, 2012, para. 20)

Figure 2. Witkin, *The Result of War: The Cornucopian Dog*, 1984 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

If the experiential account makes the existence of ugliness unverifiable, and the natural solution of objectivism is unfeasible and unsatisfying, then in what can we identify ugliness in the artworks that follow? Before we can answer this, we need to acknowledge that aesthetic properties are experiences that do depend on physical characteristics in some way, but also to recognise that no rule specifies *how*. Therefore, the notion "ugly aesthetic" as used in this thesis, takes on the idea that aesthetic properties *supervene on* sensory and physical properties. However, they are not equivalent or reducible to them. This form of relation between sets of properties is popular in contemporary philosophical literature, for example, in the work of Levinson (1999) as well as Pettit (1987) and Zangwill (2001; 2004). Instead, they postulate that some aesthetic property *depends* for its existence on some (set of) non-aesthetic propert(ies):

> A fundamental principle is that aesthetic properties are determined by, or are dependent on, non-aesthetic properties. Things come to have aesthetic properties *because of* or in virtue of their non-aesthetic properties. For example, a performance of a piece of music is delicate *because of* a certain arrangement of sounds, and an abstract painting is brash or beautiful *because of* a certain spatial arrangement of colours (Zangwill, 2003, para. 2, original italics).[46]

The presence of an aesthetic property is something that humans can intuit *within*, or *amongst* the interactions of other features in an object: it depends on and emanates from this 'base' but transcends it, and therefore cannot be explained away by it. This thesis argues that irreducibility to the physical is what gives the aesthetic the mystical potential described by Gellman (2017). Gracyk (2012) points out that an aesthetic experience depends on the "presence of ordinary perceptible properties, such as colours, sounds and textures", which we can see as the lower-level properties from which the aesthetic properties emerge (termed the "perceptive" below) (p. 126). Further, those perceptible properties depend on even lower-level properties, such as the primary (physical) properties of the object, or chemical properties, for example, the chemical structure of the paint gives rise to the colour of the painting.

[46] An aesthetic property is something that we sense as 'living' in an *object*. Even in sentences such as 'there is such ugliness', or 'there are so many uglinesses', there is always an implicit thing we seem to be referring to that is 'possessed by' ugliness. Ugliness needs to live in an 'object', to express itself through the object, in order to exist at all, because, according to the supervenience equation, it depends on the "primary properties" of the object.

Besides honouring this so-called "explanatory gap" (Levine, 1983), supervenience also maintains that aesthetic properties must be intrinsically experiential because they depend on experiential sensory properties for their existence but bear something 'extra'. This added element marks the aesthetic as *different from* and *of a higher order than* the sensory. The phenomenological essence of the aesthetic means that all aesthetic experiences are psycho-spiritual and potentially mystical, for they cannot be reduced to physical occurrences.[47] It further suggests that a description of an aesthetic property must attend a description of the *experience of* the perceptual (experience of lower-level supervenience base) and felt (the 'extra' aesthetic element that emerges from this experience) – *this* is the ontology of a substantive aesthetic property. As the American historian Carmichael (1972) puts it, "It might be thought that a mark of aesthetic acumen is to see feelingly" (p. 496).[48] What differentiates the 'delicate' object from the 'dreary' one; in other words, what informs the system of aesthetic categorisation, are the differences in these deeper psychic configurations. Each aesthetic quality may consist of its own range of emotions or haptic sensations; those come together and co-emerge to make unique aesthetic experiences to which we give distinct names (of the 'delicate', 'dreary', 'elegant' or 'cumbersome').

Where do such insights lead us is in our attempt to commonly find ugliness in Witkin's works and those that he references? In order to honour its experiential essence and the supervenience relation, this thesis does not purport to provide a watertight formula for the certification of ugliness in parts of the artworks that follow.[49] More humbly, it attempts to refine the phenomenological description:

[47] This term is introduced by Levine to refer to the challenge that physicalist theories have in explaining how physical properties give rise to the way things feel or are experienced. This is also relevant to the aesthetic, for the aesthetic is a form of extra-sensory *experience* of an object that cannot be explained by, made equivalent to, or reduced to a specific set of physical criteria in an object.

[48] There is concern about the predominance of the visual in aesthetics. Diaconu (2006), for example, interrogates the difficulties of developing an aesthetic of touch, smell and taste. Barwich (2015; 2016) argues that modern neuroscience has uncovered that olfaction is not unsophisticated and "affective", but that flavour and fragrance assessment require discernment and refinement. Such arguments demand that the ugly aesthetic be felicitous to the ugly smell, touch, sound, and taste.

[49] Here, following Zemach (1997) and Schellekens (2008), we learn how to apply aesthetic terms through a process of ostension after encountering paradigmatic instances. However, whereas Zemach uses this shared application of aesthetic terms as evidence for realism – there is a common apprehension of something existing, which is the basis upon which critics can disagree – it can also be said that what we are describing is a commonly understood *experience* of an object, so that once we know of a dozen or so of cases of seventeenth-century Flemish paintings generally considered to be particularly well-balanced and unified, it might enable us to assess which other such paintings can rightly be described as well-balanced and unified too (p. 133). Schellekens (2008) writes about the way in which art, and the accompanying criticism, facilitate the acquisition of aesthetic concepts through a process of "ostention" (p. 132). Here, with time, we might acquire some ideas about which items are considered paradigmatic as helpful guides in our concept-applications.

it focuses on collating reports on *what it is like* to experience an object as ugly *when* one feels it does.[50]

The "perceptive" part of this aesthetic equation includes a description of the encounter with the supervenience base of the aesthetic: one of the sensory qualities (which may include olfactory, auditory, gustatory or somatosensory impressions) of the object (that themselves depend on primary qualities that are given to us only in the experience of the object) and the conceptual classification of the object into a 'type'. Empirical psychologists include two components: grouping the object (sensory) and recognising or identifying it (conceptual) (Weiten, 2007). Grouping the object requires assimilating or 'binding' sensory units into a unified object. This implies that aesthetic experience is always *of an object*, unlike, for example, the experience of pain.

The "cognitive" part of the equation, on the other hand, requires the ability to recognise the object as a member of a certain class: differentiating Witkin's dog's vegetative contents from an intestinal tract, or an amputated arm from a bunch of grapes, which follows insights of "ontological relativism". Following Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1990), this is what the British art philosopher Wollheim (2015) called the process of "seeing as": part of perceiving is identifying something as a certain kind of thing (p. 140). We can reason that since typological classifications of objects are a primary part of the aesthetic process, aesthetic experiences must be intimately linked to the philosophical area of 'ontology'– questions about the nature of objects and their essence. The cognitive dimension differentiates from the purely sensory experience, and the inclusion of the sensory-perceptive dimension differentiates it from being a mere "feeling": emotional descriptions or adjectives for tone that we extend to aesthetic objects, such as, for example, 'horrific' or 'melancholic', as to Witkin's work. It may also protect the aesthetic from the allegations of aesthetic emotivist theories, in which aesthetic terms, such as the

[50] The description of an experience of an object acknowledges the way in which, in aesthetics, the "reality of inner and outer life is criss-crossed by processes of projection and introjection" (Maclagan, 2005, p. 40). Maclagan (2005) attempts to make a case for the false dichotomy of inner and outer lives. He quotes Merleau Ponty "… [t]here is a fundamental narcissism to all vision. … He experiences the vision he exercises as coming from the side of things [and yet] I feel myself looked at by things … one no longer knows who is seeing and who is seen." (Merleau Ponty, 1964, p. 183 as cited in Maclagan, 2005, p. 38).

'beautiful' and the 'ugly', are used as an expression of polarised feelings, namely pleasure and pain respectively.[51]

The "felt" part of the equation is the dimension bracketed-off in the aesthetic experience that differentiates it from the purely perceptual. It is named the "felt" not in a general phenomenological sense. As Maclagan (2005) notes, the word 'feeling' may create ambiguity because it refers to both "sensation or exploration, as well as to emotion as one possible result of such processes.[52] We do not always know what comes first, the perception, or sensation, or the emotional response" (p. 12). As Maclagan puts it, we can distinguish the felt more generally, through the understanding that it involves other psychological responses that inform how we are moved or swayed by the perception object in aesthetic experience. It is a feeling that somehow emerges for us from/within/amongst the so-called "supervening" perceptual properties. It contains the elements of the extra-sensory, and it is this mental/spiritual quality that often renders the aesthetic as mystical or psycho-spiritual at large. Some of these qualities may even be mystical experiences of God. They are:

> … a somewhat different range of experience from the traditional psychology of perception… [they are] the complex and shifting array of sensations, feelings, fantasies, thoughts and other less easily categorizable events of mental life that accompany all perceptions, whether we are aware of

[51] Here, not only are pleasure and pain artificially polarised, but the realm of the aesthetic is rendered as hedonic. For aesthetic feelings are complex webs: in the case of beauty, for example, the psychoanalyst, Hagman (2005), suggests that there may be awe, terror and even envy; in the case of ugliness, horror and perverse attraction. They also seem different to emotional descriptions we extend to objects, such as, for example, 'joyful' or 'melancholic' in a Bach fugue or a painting by Mondrian. The American perceptual theorist Arheim (2004) examines this question about expression in his *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (2004, p. 447). According to Arnheim, these are ascribed not through a feeling in the subject, but through an analogy between the perceived features or "pattern of stimulus" of the object and the physiognomic features displayed by humans when in those mental states. For example, the pace, volume and pitch of joyful music would be higher than in melancholic music. This emotivist theory seems to be the basis for Carmichael's (1972) remark that, "[t]here is a psychic tympanum on which the ugly and the immoral both strike, each resounding through the other. To us they are distinguishable through the discriminative virtue of this tympanum, and not only they but also the fitting and unfitting, the worthy and unworthy, the positive and negative in everything, according to the perceptive capacity of this organ. There is a superfine pitch where the ugly and the immoral are scarcely distinguishable. Both are repugnancies, differing only in degree or complexity. A false musical note and a false witness, for example, would be so many degrees, respectively, of repugnancy; a wanton act and a grotesque facade, a sordid character and a desolate scene, an incongruous, confused deposition and a jumbled, planless household would all be commensurable. Everything would resolve into unalloyed repugnancy" (p. 496).

[52] Indeed, I.A. Richards (2004) expresses this well in his theory that aesthetic terms are "projectile adjectives" that "incite such and such feelings". In the case of 'gorgeous' for example, "the descriptions of the feelings would have to be long and include mention of a tendency to contempt, grudging admiration, and a certain richness and fullness and perhaps satiation." (Richards, 2004, "Sense and Feeling", para. 8.)

them or not. This is something called the 'psychological lining of experience' (MacLagan, 2005, p.7).

Maclagan (2005) emphasises that the two domains of perceptual and felt are not mutually exclusive. The phenomenological nature of the explanation of the ugly aesthetic means that a description of the perceptual is a description of the *feeling of/in* perceiving ugliness. Aesthetic experiences are complex webs of psychological phenomena, which makes them difficult to cast as pure opposites. This theory also allows for varying intensity: the more potent the experience, the more the experience is of an ugly object.[53]

Where do these perceptive-felt qualities of ugly objects further direct us in our attempt to identify ugliness in the mystical conversation of the artworks that follow? The insights above mean that if the ugly aesthetic is a configuration of particular perceptive and felt qualities, then a description of these qualities will require *psychological* research, and not philosophical *a priori* "armchair" analysis (Schellekens, 2008, p.47).[54] The architectural theorist, Cousins' psychoanalytic theory insists that "[i]f ugliness is to become an object of inquiry, this inquiry will have to be conducted outside the scope of [philosophical] aesthetics" (Cousins, 1994, p. 62).[55] It is also what Maclagan (2005) calls "psychological aesthetics" (p. 7). In the chapter that follows, we shall, therefore, assemble literary textual reports on this perceptive and felt nature of encounters. Following the supervenience principle, events or phenomenon that *may* enable the perceptive occurrence characteristic of ugliness can act as a heuristic for ugly objects in the artworks. While there are no objective signs in the object for ugly feelings, the representational reality of artworks (in which subject is conveyed through formal elements) can 'express' ugly feelings through a formal language. By deepening these descriptions with a more developed theory of the psychoanalytic

[53] See problem of "callilogical neutrality" above.

[54] In her doctoral thesis, *A Reasonable Objectivism for Aesthetic Judgement* (2008), Schellekens puts forward a case for the collaboration of philosophy and psychology in aesthetic judgement. For her, research into psychological processes informing judgements can help to achieve greater objectivity. She explains the role of psychology as follows: "(i) the psychological assumptions connected with aesthetic practice (both descriptive and prescriptive); (ii) the psychological foundations of particular aesthetic evaluations; and (iii) issues about abilities and dispositions involved in the making of aesthetic judgements. Central to the idea of aesthetic psychology is, then, the concern of how the mind works in an aesthetic context" (p. 47).

[55] Sibley and Schaper (1966) write that "aestheticians encounter ranges of concepts wider than and inevitably including of those studied by most other branches of philosophy." (p. 69)

pre-symbolic, we can give such an experience a ‘place’ in our psyche; a place that manifests in the creation of an alternative realm of the artworks. Such is the task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

UGLY OBJECTS AND UGLY PLACE, UGLY FEELINGS: CRITERIA FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF THREE TYPES OF UGLINESS IN WITKIN'S UGLY-MYSTICAL CONVERSATION

"… [T]here are no truly beautiful surfaces without dreadful depths" (Nietzsche as cited in Read, 1965, p. 51).

This chapter follows the protocol outlined in the previous chapter in order to provide ways in which we can apprehend three necessary types of ugliness. The thesis derives these frameworks from a weaving of theory that must be explained and outlined before it can be applied to a complex art historical analysis of ugliness in mysticism in the artworks that follow. These include representations of ugly objects in all the artworks analysed, the "ugly place" inserted by Witkin in his remakes of Renaissance mystical worlds, and the expressive elements of ugly feeling substituted for the other kinds of mystical feeling in the Baroque. Descriptions of the experience of ugliness are referenced from sparse literary sources that engage theoretically with, or report on, ugliness, for no empirical studies exist.[56] These accounts include a series of lectures by Cousins (1994, 1995) that have been well-cited and widely applied; the theoretical insights provided by literary scholar, Hepburn, in his study of ugliness in *Pascali's Island* in his *Enchanted Objects* (2010); the Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist Žižek's references to ugliness in his *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World* (1997); the late literary scholar, Adam's, thoughts in his paper *Ideas of Ugly* (1974), as well as those of the historian, Carmichael, in his *The Sense of Ugliness* (1972). Such accounts are primarily "perceptive" and, in order to provide the substance necessary for the other two types of ugliness, the chapter draws on three accounts/concepts of the psychoanalytic pre-symbolic. Thus, Melanie Klein's "paranoid-schizoid position", Jacques Lacan's "Real" and "*hommelette"* and Julia Kristeva's "chôra" and "abject" – are integrated as secondary-level sources. The overlap in descriptions with ugliness provides substantiation for the argument that distinct experiential features of ugliness coalesce as they do because they are

[56] There have, in contrast, been neuroscientific studies that examine the parts of the brain active in ugly (non-beautiful) experiences, in a field called "neuroaesthetics". See Kandel (2012). In Kawabata and Zeki (2004), the authors present research that suggests the medio-orbital frontal cortex lights up in experiences of beauty, and the motor cortex fires in experiences of ugliness. The amygdala is activated in both.

remnants of this entire mode of early relational consciousness (or the unconscious) between infant and (m)other.[57]

Indeed, based on his understanding of ugliness, Witkin does not pronounce or understand his spirituality as one of the 'ugly'. However, he refers to the ugly mysticism (defined in this thesis) indirectly, by describing the sanctity of his artworks as residing in the making visible of the "invisible" (Witkin, 1985, p. 84), the objectification of the "unfathomable" (Witkin, 1985, p. 85), the grappling with the "hidden" (Celant, 1995, p. 51). This chapter attempts to reveal that such descriptions target the core of the ugly experience. Here, the essence of the encounter of the ugly object is captured in the re-emergent description of the perceptual (and consequent conceptual) experience of having a knowable identity of a thing punctured by an underlying sense of its (or any object's) mysteriousness. Like the sub-sensory experience of seeing the truth of the objects of this Rabbi and desk, it is an experience that is free from censoring or obfuscating prototypes of objects, such as 'rabbi-hood' or 'deskhood'. Hepburn establishes this point in his core description of ugliness as an encounter with the "shattering of a phantasy of what makes up the object" (Hepburn, 2010, p. 219). This idea is also expressed through descriptions of the subversion of "interiority" and "exteriority" in the sight of the object (Cousins, 1995), of formless substance leaking out of its containing form, of ontological goo rupturing through a representational shell, of oozing wound in mask (Cousins, 1994). As Žižek (1997) writes: "the shock of ugliness occurs when the surface is usually cut, opened up to reveal direct insight into the actual depths of the object" (p. 22). For these reasons, this thesis defines ugliness as: less of the kind of thing it needs to be in order to be a kind of thing, and therefore any*thing* at all.

[57] It synthesises some of these descriptions, with an awareness of Maclagan's (2005) warning to avoid "pinning down" or "doing violence to" the ultimately intrinsic ineffability of their words, particularly because they are "affects" or non- or pre-verbal energies with a particular "feeling tone" (p. 13). The descriptive strategy used in this thesis is inspired by "functionalists" in the philosophy of mind. Here, ugliness will be "distinguished from other mental states by the network of causal relations in which they are situated … by its causes (this includes a perceptual experience of the object itself), its effects and relations to other mental states [some of which are phenomenal themselves and can be unpacked in the same fashion]. Change in any single element in the network and the character of the mental state changes too" (Buechner, 2008, p. 6-7).

Cousins explains this sub-sensory experience as an inversion of the interiority and exteriority of the object. [58] [59] His theory is put forward as follows:

> If we grant that an object exists twice – firstly as a representation of itself, and secondly as its existence – then the outside of a thing (representation) must enclose the inside of a thing (existence). This proportionality [implied by Classical notions of beauty], in which the exterior 'overcoats' the interior, in which the object as representation contains the object as existence, has the necessary consequence of changing the nature of the distinction between interior and exterior (1995, p. 3).

In the immediate discussion, Cousins insists that, for humans, this 'existence' is always presented to perception in an 'exterior' physical form, that not only 'encloses' or 'packages' this 'essence' beneath, but 'represents' that essence to the mind for conceptual 'knowing'– the recognition of the object in the perceptual process that is the basis with which we classify it within the boundaries of concepts. These concepts of "interiority" and "exteriority" of physical form can, it seems, be mapped onto the respective concepts of substance and form in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to which Witkin personally refers: "I believe that all my photographs are incarnations, representing the *form* and *substance* of what my mind sees and attempts to understand" (Coke, 1985, p. 6, italics added). They locate ugliness within the questions of 'ontology', which Hamlyn (2005) locates within the domain of metaphysics: an area that grapples with the "features of ultimate reality, what really exists and what it is that distinguishes that and makes it possible" (p. 560). Lowe (2005) concurs that ontology is "a branch of metaphysics … embracing such issues as the nature of existence and the categorical structure of reality… [e]xisting things" (p. 670). This definition links it directly to Gellman's mysticism.

[58] The exception may lie in kinds of things that Brady (2010) calls "inherently" ugly, e.g. an eel, spider or mosquito that embody their kind to a *greater* degree, the uglier they are (p. 36)

[59] Both Pop (2014) and Brady (2010), also consider the possibility that one can consider *an object* as beautiful or ugly as "an object" in a case of "apparent ugliness". For example, for Brady, a bruise might be beautiful as a coloured mark, but not as a blemish on the skin (p. 36). It must be noted, however, that this definition, puts beauty and ugliness as opposites, and defines the aesthetic experiences as purely perceptive. In addition, the very definition of the "aesthetic" employed, does not include the cognitive dimension. According to the theory of the "ugly aesthetic", an experience of not knowing a thing is at the heart of the ugly experience. An objection can also be made, that one is always inferring the identity of the object in an aesthetic experience: one cannot "sit with" thinglessness: the bruise may be "seen as" another object, perhaps taking on rainbow-like qualities.

Here, this Ancient Classical philosopher concludes that 'being' itself (any form of existing) depends on (physical) form. This form is defined as the morphology or organisation of the matter (e.g. the form of the dog or arm) of a particular physically-existing thing. [60] Indeed the identity of the object, the 'doghood' of the dissected dog in *The Result of War: The Cornucopia Dog* (Witkin, 1984) or 'armness' of the arm in *Anna Akmatova* (Witkin, 1998) cannot be known to the subject unless it has been subjected to a kind of regime of representation. For example, the identity of being a dog is only accessible to us through the flesh in the form of a long snout with non-retractable claws; or of the identity of the hand through its embodiment as bones, nerves, blood, and muscles that make an extension from the shoulder to the elbow to the hand.[61] However, more profoundly, Aristotle claims that the very force of being itself, cannot exist at all without inhabiting this physical form of the type. This means that the human mind cannot perceive the formless; in formlessness, there is no object there to detect. For Aristotle, without the containing physical form (or Cousins' "exterior") there is only a "bare particular". We can think of this "interior" prime matter as the indeterminate qualities, substratum or gunk, which renders the object thingless and non-existent. In other words, for Aristotle, sub-sensory experiences are impossible, because they are, by definition, encounters with reality sans the discrete objects.

Cousins (1995) illustrates this idea of dependency on instantiation through the metaphor of the face. He explains that the expression on the face signifies the meaning 'behind' it, the 'essence' of the human 'depths' being represented here. Moreover, in the case of the face, the surface and the depth collapse into one – the face is the *epitome* of expression itself. One cannot imagine expression without imagining the features as having that expression, so one can only think of the depths through the surface. For these reasons, the sight of the face is overwhelming: we intuit a

[60] In Aristotelian thinking, form is physical, i.e. "the matter of any item is the stuff, the material from which it is made, for example, the clay or iron; the form is its organization, shape, pattern given to the stuff by a craftsman, for example, by a potter in making a bowl" (Dent, 2005, p. 305). In fact, in his *Physics,* II, 3, and *Metaphysics* V,2, Aristotle argues the form is the essence of some 'thing' (substance), which, after his exploration of the four types of course, he concludes has to do with the form (design, "formal cause") and function (telos, "final cause"), and that is it the form (principle of organisation) that is the substance or essence of a thing, what gives it "being" (Aristotle, 1961 p. 28-30; Aristotle, 2007, pp. 89-106)

[61] This is a point made by Blanchot in his essay entitled *Two Versions of the Imaginary* (1955), which is referenced by Schwenger in his interpretation of Witkin's use of corpses: "In the first and most common version … an image is secondary to an object. It is a reflection of what is already there, something that comes after it, making its way to the subject. The second version – Blanchot's version – realizes that we do not know the object seen except through the image, which consequently comes not second but first …" (Schwenger, 2000, p. 401).

depth but cannot actually imagine it, because this essence can only be represented to ourselves in the facial representation. Cousin's writes that:

> it is in this sense that ugliness arises as and when the interior of the object, exceeds for a subject, its representational exterior. It might be tempting to regard this event as a simple issue of something leaking or bursting out of the representational shell. … It involves the causal proposition that, as long as the representational order of the object overcoats its existence, it also determines the phantasy of what the inside is (Cousins, 1995, p. 3).

This image encapsulates the ugly occurrence, and it is one that Witkin (1997) himself echoes in his wish to "seek the face before he was made" (p. 143). Cousins is reinforcing Aristotle's idea that the way in which the human mind can only know existence itself by coming into contact with some kind of physical form through which it expresses it, and to only know this form through a concept constructed through language. Here, to extend Aristotle's idea, we are only ever acquainted with formless existence (sub-sensory) at a remove – through these physical *and conceptual* conduits. This dependence implies that this 'truth' is *hidden by* the illusion and therefore "interior" (to the physical or conceptual surface). To return to the facial metaphor, this containing exterior, is actually a 'phantasy' of what, objectively, lies behind the face. This is why a wound "overmines" and "throws off" the "expressive economy" of the face, thereby rendering it as an illusionary veneer or a mask (Cousins, 1995a, p. 4). Thus, it seems that ugliness exposes us to the artificiality of our relationship to objects in the world; the sight of formlessness, or the truth of object-lessness, with which Aristotle does not think it possible to be acquainted.

Aristotle further argues that to know any*thing*, one has to come to know the essence of a particular *some*thing: an instance of the physical existence of a Labrador in New Mexico right now. This means that dog cannot be an example of dogs in general nor be an example of the concept of a dog. However, this particularism does not fit with our theory of ugliness because the idea of ugliness relies on the violation of *typologies.* Here, entities are grouped according to their a shared propert[ies]; the idiosyncrasy is bracketed off. The violation of the conceptual form in ugliness requires that this physical occurrence has an impact on the *idea* we have of what type of thing that that object is – this is why this thesis describes it as less of a thing it needs to be in order

to be a *type* of thing, or any*thing* at all.[62] For these reasons, we need to also draw on Plato's idea of conceptual engagement with Aristotle's physical objects to understand ugliness. This is contrary to Aristotle, because for this Classical philosopher, knowing an object, always means or involves knowing it *as a type* of thing. [63] In this Classical philosopher's theory of universals, a physical thing is the earthly *instantiation of* this perfect, abstract structure, but only holds the identity of this type to the extent that it conforms to this ideal picture. [64] Plato conceives of Forms as distillations of the essential of features that give an instantiation its 'level of belonging' to a *category* (how much of a dog is Witkin's dog?), which inspires the cognitive experience of ugliness.[65]

There are thus two crucial, interrelated features of ugly occurrence that help us to identify ugliness in Witkin's work, and to understand its potential to give us a taste of ultimate reality. Firstly, Cousin's work explains the topographical nature of our knowledge of objects: ugliness subverts the *spatial relation* of illusionary surface and underlying, true depth of an object's identity. As the twentieth-century satirist Dorothy Parker puts it: "Beauty is only skin deep, but ugliness goes clean to the bone" (as cited in Parris, 2016, "Kings, Queens and Commoners", para. 15). This "overcoating" or "containing" function of the representative or signifying exterior of physical or conceptual form, is, it seems, a function of the nature of three-dimensional physical objects and of

[62] There would otherwise be a failure to explain why ugliness lies over unique objects that seem out-of-place.

[63] As the perceptual signs for the identification of ugliness, below, refer to the rupturing of the form of both the physical and the conceptual object. Indeed, in the very definition of the "perceptual dimension of the aesthetic", the thesis includes both sensory and conceptual components (metaphor). However, the full meaning of Cousins (1995) account can only be understood through a linking of two seemingly disparate notions of physical versus conceptual form that are found in the theories of Plato and Aristotle, which weave through Cousins' theory.

[64] It must be acknowledged that the use of Plato and Aristotle's metaphysics does not cohere with the phenomenological account of the ugly aesthetic that is pursued. Both accounts are underpinned by realism in that they attempt to provide a true account of the nature of reality, and not to forms of cognitive experience. However, according to the naturalisation principle, philosophical theories can be psychologised: the philosophical theory of the 'way the world is' can be translated into cognitive theories regarding 'the way human beings perceive the world'. The cognitive psychologists Bousfield, Cohen and Whitmarsh (1958), for example, follow Plato in this respect, because he describes the way that human beings organise knowledge and memories within their mind as a 'conceptual hierarchy'. This is a system of classification, with layers of organisation based on categories of belonging determined by shared common properties between items.

[65] The 'forms' are only 'forms' on the basis that they participate in higher order form that Plato calls the "Form of the Good" or the "Form of the Beautiful". Plato conceives of forms as distillations of the essential features that give an instantiation its 'level of belonging' to a *category*. This perhaps explains why the encounter of beauty is deemed 'otherworldly' (perhaps inaccessible) – as coming from higher places; different from the 'underbelly' from which ugliness emerges. In other words, beauty and ugliness "belong to quite different registers" (Cousins, 1995, p.1).

conceptual prototypes that attempt to "contain" the knowledge of the "truth" of the object in a contained object and idea that covers up for its essential formlessness or unknowability.

Thus, secondly, in this facial metaphor of inside escaping exterior container, the sight of blood and gore seeping out represents the encounter with that which does not 'signify' or mean *anything*: it is a kind of "non-signifying" interior and it "projects stuff of another order or disorder" (pp. 3-4). The revelation is of an object-lessness and meaninglessness that enters the perception of "interiority" without its representing form. This is why, for Žižek (1997), the shock of ugliness occurs when the surface is cut open to direct insight into the "*actual* depths of the object" (p. 22). Žižek claims that this act of "spilling out" captures the ugly object that is "larger than itself": its existence is larger than its representation. Žižek refers to menstruation as "an exemplary case of such an ugly inside spilling out" (p. 24).

This insight indicates that the horror of the ugly object lies in its uncategorisably within typologies that organise objects – the wound-in-the-form may disrupt the ontological schemas with which we sort objects in the world as types of things. Hepburn (2010) explains that ugliness "designates something we can't even imagine" (p. 216), and Carmichael uses the term "wanton" for the way in which ugliness resides in abhorrence of the "reckless, cowardly, degraded, morbid, defiled, depraved", which is "repugnant to the imagination … near the nadir of aesthetic comprehension" (Carmichael, 1972, p. 496). So, contrary to Aristotle, thinglessness exists, and ugliness gives an experience of it; herein exposing the very illusion of ontological demarcation.

Since the Ideal only exists as the idea, the ugly object exists in the mishaps intrinsic to physical instantiation. As will be evidenced in the transcendent versus immanent forms of mysticism that follow, ugliness belongs to a "world of ineluctable individuality, contingency and resistance to the Ideal" (Carmichael, 1972, p. 492). He further refers to how ugliness' "lacking" resides in that which falls short of a "mark set by reason or definition". Ugliness is of the mortal world, one of "deformity and defects" (Cousins, 1995). This explains why Witkin propounds finding God in the "strange", "bizarre" and "disjunctive' (Horvat, 1989, para. 36) and his claim that he wants to bring "God back down to earth" (Witkin, 1985, p. 9). Adams (1974) associates ugliness with "the particular, the expressive, and the material" (p. 59). Carmichael (1972) describes ugliness as

inhering in the "abortive": failing to reach some standard in deformity, defect, mistake, the feeble, the sluggard (p.495), which Witkin echoes in his idea of the "okay" as boring (Horvat, 1989, para. 36). Carmichael further includes the "awkward, incongruous, confused, inapposite, bizarre, otiose" (p. 495). Cousins (1994) goes on to write that in their lacking, which makes them non-ideal, "they are too strongly individual; are too much themselves" (p. 61).[66]

In order to further flesh out the meaning of Witkin's scattered spiritual aphorisms, we can correlate this description of the ugly experience to other theories that pertain to the ontologically mysterious. This numinous encounter with an unrepresentable, unknowable, and physically/conceptually formless (non)object, is intriguingly reminiscent in psychoanalytic descriptions of the infant's experience of his world (described often as, wholly, his mother or other, that which is not him) during the developmental phase called the "pre-symbolic". [67] Here, we put forward the idea that pre-symbolic refers to a developmental period pervaded by the characteristically ugly experience; perceptual abilities or language with which to symbolise or identify the object are only nascent or absent. [68] According to Gibeault (2005), this ability to "symbolise" is defined by psychoanalysis as the operation by which something comes to represent something else for someone. Aside from allowing one term to substitute for another, symbolisation designates the "flow of information between" and the very separation between subject and object, the realities of the mind and the outside world, and past and present" (para. 1-3).[69] If we can show that the pre-symbolic reality surfaces with the ugly occurrence, we can designate the ugly object described by the theorists

[66] Such associations seem to be the reason for which Pop (2014) writes that ugliness deals with "form, fear, evil, proximity, and the physical" (p. 15).

[67] From this developmental aesthetic perspective, ugliness is merely an "overarching label for a matrix of experiences" that come together in the infant's (subject) experience of the mother (object) in this developmental stage described in psychodynamic literature (Hagman, 2005, p. 2). In his *Foreward* to Hagman's *Aesthetic Experience: Beauty, Creativity, and the Search for the Ideal*, Rotenberg describes that in Hagman's "developmental aesthetics" in general, the "root of [all] aesthetic experience" is to be found in the "earliest somatic, perceptual and kinaesthetic experiences of infant and mother, that intersubjective domain." (Rotenberg, 2005, as cited in Hagman, 2005, p, ix). For Hagman, "the implicit procedural representations [of the mother] … possess an aesthetic quality that is formally complex, diverse and affectively rich. … The child organises these repeated experiences together, which structure their outer and inner worlds – object (other) and self (their experiences of themselves as 'object') (p. 35)."

[68] It must be noted that the syncretisation and synthesis of these chosen three theories of the psychoanalytic are potentially problematic. There are many analyses of the convergences and divergences of these respective theories along several dimensions. These theorists often provide criticism for one another. For example, Barzilai (1991) interrogates Kristeva's criticism of Lacan.

[69] It is the ability to use symbols that facilitates "ego formation, the awareness of separateness from object and the way the body becomes meaningful to the mind" (Gaddini & Limentani, 1992, p. 2).

above as memory of what contemporary psychoanalyst Bollas (2018) describes as a form of the "unthought known". This pre-verbal, un-schematised, uncrystallised and somatic experience cannot (has not) be retrieved into a 'thinkable' thought. This is because it is formed at a time before the formation of such a thought (memory) through the concepts of language is possible.[70] It appears that this reality is one in which Witkin sees the world in its Godly truth. He has often reported going to "regression therapy" in order to tap into an alternative state of consciousness, which involved time in utero, when his triplet-sister died (Marino, 2013).[71] Manatakis (2019) refers to the idea that it is this very (ugly) linguistic or representational insufficiency that is at the core of his philosophy: the taboo "death, eroticism and religion" are intangible and ungraspable. For her, "American photographer Joel-Peter Witkin is a master of actualising 'this' spirituality: his photography turns what most of us find even hard to *speak about* into hauntingly dark imagery" (para. 11, inverted commas added).

The specific concept of symbolisation is rarely mentioned by the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud, although it is instrumental to his workings of the unconscious mind.[72] We can look to three psychodynamic successors whose understanding of this period is pertinent to ugliness in order to develop a picture of Witkin's spiritual reality. Klein's object-relational theory evokes the pre-symbolic world (0-4/6 months), as one of "phantasy", in which there are no separable "things". Klein details a reality devoid of discrete units; this same spiritual experience to which the artist refers and attempts to re-access, and which we also attribute to the experience triggered by ugliness. Klein refers to a spatiotemporal inability: the child has no sense of where things (his body, his mother's body, other objects) start (Watts, 2002).[73] In perceptual terms, the infant has no

[70] In this realm of non-perception, memory of the pre-symbolic is therefore "existential" – a retrieval of a mode of being and "a force of dissemination that moves us to places beyond thinking" (Bollas, 2018, p. 17). The ugly object therefore as a form of this emerging memory, takes into account the "wordless element in the adult" (Bollas, 2018, pp. 3-4). In Bollas' (1997) analysis of evocative object, he introduces the term "mnemic object" as an object that is "endowed with previous self-experiences" – the ugly object (p. 35).

[71] In his documentary *Objective Eye* (2013), Witkin states how he repeatedly sensed his antenatal sibling during his own regression in primal therapy (Marino, 2013).

[72] For Freud, what is repressed is symbolised by the unconscious through substitution in "symbol formation", which may exist as symptoms or the products of sublimation and can be found in dreams. These symbols are mostly privately constructed, with the exception of universal symbols (Rycroft, 1995).

[73] Freud notices the use of symbolisation by his eighteenth-month-old grandson Ernst, in a game he called Fort/Da (Here/Gone) in his *The Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which the child used the appearance or disappearance of toys and string on a reel, and the word "o-o-o-o" to represent his disappeared mother (in mourning a separateness from her) and himself in the mirror.

perception of the figure-ground relationship or the organising principles of *gestalt"* (Watts, 2002, p.94).[74] Instead, he merely lives through the sensations of his body; those generated from the "self" and those given by the body of the mother in breastfeeding, with whom he is merged (Watts, 2002). Within the infant's monistic, solipsistic reality, the mother is rendered as an extension of the infant's consciousness (Watts, 2002, p. 95).[75] He projects these experiences onto "concrete bits" or part objects. For Watts (2002), Klein's notion of the infant phantasy world is an experience without differentiation of outside-inside or self and other. This is what is invoked in the object-lessness of the ugly object; ugliness is a "stain" that contaminates and blurs the boundary between objects and subjects (Cousins, 1994, p. 63).

Without an 'inside or 'outside', the infant uses a mixture of the "endo-psychic" processes of taking in (introjection) and putting out (projection) in order to keep pain and pleasure in separate "places".[76] In this psychoanalyst's paper entitled *Some Theoretical Conclusions: The Emotional Life of the Infa*nt (originally published in 1952), Klein describes the infant's feelings of being gratified such as the alleviation of hunger, the pleasure of sucking, the freedom from discomfort or tension, that is, from privations, and the experience of being loved are attributed to the synecdochic "good breast" (Klein, 2017b, p. 63). Likewise, the bad breast becomes "the prototype of all external and internal persecutory objects" and that therefore, every frustration and discomfort are attributed to the "bad persecuting breast" (p. 63). Klein (2017a) explains that as a result of this "splitting" in the monistic reality (of ugliness), there is terror (p. 70). The child has to "split" this bad experience off into a separate mental 'area' because he bears a "persecutory anxiety" in which feels that all badness – whether pain from inside him or from his mother as the source – will engulf and annihilate him (Klein, 2017a, p. 64). Without boundaries separating 'this-thing' from 'that-thing', there is a risk that all his good experiences will be "spoilt" or infected by this badness. He uses this mental strategy in order to fend off ominous pain and to 'protect' his good feelings of safety and pleasure (Watts, 2002). In this way, he can accumulate enough goodness to sustain him when this engulfing dark 'thing' (or feeling) re-attacks (Watts, 2002). While Klein emphasises the

[74] The perceptual notion a 'gestalt' does not reside in Klein's work. Rather, Watts (2002), appropriates the term from the early twentieth century Gestalt school of psychology, to frame the infantile 'splitting' of the mother as (at least partially) a perceptual phenomenon. This idea of seeing a whole that 'is more than a sum of its parts' has its origins in Köhler (1992).

[75] This is often referred to as "primary narcissism" – the experience of the self as all there is.

[76] Actually, Klein's theoreticisation of this reality contradicts its non-representability; she refers to this 'thing', although for the infant no such separate 'thing' exists.

schizoid defence mechanisms used by the infant to protect himself against what she highlights as a paranoia of invasion of badness in ugly formlessness, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan is interested in the way in which the lack of objects threatens the sense of self – in particular in this primitive apprehension. For Lacan, the unpresentable and object-less realm is not particular to a developmental period, but a linguistic register called "The Real", to which the "symbolic" (the realm of differential elements of signifiers, speech and language employed by the socialised subject), and the "imaginary" (the dimension of images – conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined, employed by the ego) are intricately related (Sheridan, 2001 pp. xii-xiii).[77] Lacan's term "signifier" is used to refer to the form or representational shell, and "signified" to "underlying stuff". For Sheridan (2001), the Real "… stands for what is neither symbolic, nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. … It may only be supposed in the algebraic *x*" (p. xii). Thus, if the ugly object is a non-object of this Real, then it confronts the viewer with a memory that cannot be represented in language Bowie (1991) calls this an "epistemological void" (p. 23). Levine helps us to picture this as a (non)time-place where "there was not yet a thing as such … Harry Potter's World of Wizards, Lord Voldemort (Full-of-Death) is the not-to-be-named Thing" (p. 33).[78]

In his *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience* (1941), Lacan presents the idea that the child's *first* conceptual and physical object is that of the "I". This "ego" is formed through his vision of his unified body in a reflection in his mirror stage, in order to separate from the mother (Lacan, 2001, p. 2). It thus helps us to understand this spiritual experience of ugliness to which Witkin refers, as one tied to our experience of our body. The sense of the "Real" in ugliness – reality prior to language and objects – is thus characteristic of the experience of the child before the mirror stage; according to Hook (2002), Lacan describes this as the *hommelette* (little scrambled person) of 0-6 months. Without perception of objects, and thus of his own physical body, the child's reality comprises experience of being *in* his body: the chaotic, uncontrolled jerkiness of the limbs and sporadic reflexes aiding survival,

[77] It must be noted that the relation between the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, is a complex one – they are linked, but different. Lacan attempts to engage with this problem in his "Borromean knot" in his *Séminaire* (1974-1975).

[78] Lacan refers to Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), which incorporates anamorphosis that uses a perspectival technique to both disguise and reveal an object, according to different visual positions of the spectator (Lacan, 1964, *Seminars*, Book XI, as cited in Levine, pp. 49-52).

render a sense of fragmentation: "dissonant unified sensorium", a "heterogeneous" centreless mass of needs and sensations into a representable object and concept (Hook, 2002, p. 155).[79]

In mirroring the occurrence of ugliness, Lacan insists that the infant's idea of this singular body of the self, the "representational shell" or "exterior" of the form to which internal phenomenological states are attributed, is actually an illusion of interior formlessness. It is a succession of phantasies or "lure of spatial identification", or the "social I" or illusionary exterior that we continually attempt to confirm through forms of mirrors, such as the mother's gaze, which confirms our singular existence. (Lacan, 2001, p.6). Lacan's work refers to the formlessness that breaks through as a re-emergence of a "fleeting, unstable, incomplete and open-ended mass" that feels uncontrollable. Thus, the ugly object evokes the experience of the Real piercing through this misapprehension or misknowing (*meconnaissance*) of the object of the *self*, and the other external objects (the 'not-me'), from which the self is, by definition, undifferentiated (Lacan, 2001, p. 7). Further, this identification of the self as a distinct ontological entity is the basis for the separation from the "mother", who stands for outside reality at large. Unification with the mother/reality represents a state of eternal satisfaction – we are needless intrauterine, for we are fed umbilically before hunger sets in. We are suspended in an optimally homeostatic temperature and are responded to with attunement when new-born. Thus, the perceptual separation of self – of distinct, separate objects – is marked with a sense of loss and feeling of needing to replace plenitude of the time in which we experienced wholeness and continuity with our environment (Felluga, 2015). There is a seamless interconnectedness when no things exist and when formlessness presides.

Julia Kristeva describes this sacred state/place/memory of non-objects that is brought about by the ugly object, as the psychic environment of the "chôra". She derives this concept from Plato's *Timaeus* (c 360 BC) in which the chôra (Greek for womb or receptacle) is postulated, and posits it as a kind of quality-less substratum or space, or a "producer or container" in which Forms (perfect ideals/what is and never becomes) and sensibles (earthly instantiations /what becomes and never is), are made. Kristeva follows Plato in presenting the chôra as an "ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the Father, and even to the syllable" (Kristeva, 1987, p.5). This

[79] "Still sunk in his motor capacity and nursling dependence … in which the I is precipitated in primordial form (Lacan, 2001, p. 2)."

follows the "Mirror Stage" (6-18 months) of Lacan, in which the self-object of the child's reflection in the mirror is her first differentiation from this mother; Rose (2003) calls this cleaving the "vanishing point of all identities" (p. 156). As such, the chôra becomes a further metaphor for the larger reality of formlessness that is triggered in the sight of the nameless and unknowable world of objects.

In contrast to Lacan, for Kristeva, the child of chôra of 0-6 months *does* possess the ability to use the proto-linguistic semiotic, material dimensions "echolalias, glossolalias, rhythms and intonations": so that he may lay the inscription of boundaries at age 4-8 months, even though he may not be able to refer to objects (McAfee, 2004, p. 19). This means that the memory of this time, although not encoded into words, is inscribed with a semiotic meaning: although conceptually "void", "empty" or "blank", it is coded in physical sensation and feeling; life and death drive – indeed for Witkin this world of mere forces materialises when he describes how, when his sister died in utero, he experienced "death before life" (Marino, 2013). For Kristeva, the re-experiencing of this intertwined state (that we take as 'ugly') is known as a confrontation with the "abject" (ugliness may indeed be the abject "object") and the child's process of separation from it, as the process of "abjection" that occurs at 4-6 months. Abjection is, too, a mechanism of separating and organising this threatening monistic perceptual reality, as in Klein's schizoid defence. Using the haptic semiotic dimension, the infant develops the boundary between the 'I' and the 'other'. Kristeva describes this process as the child "violently throwing out, jettisoning eject[ing] beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable ... that which is opposed to the 'I'" (Kristeva, 2008, p.3). In fact, abjection is a primitive, tenuous form of attempting to separate: the "child has a sense of the abject (as a boundary) even before things are and drives out even before they are signifiable" (Barrett, 2011, p. 98).[80]

[80] This is what Oliver (1993) means when she writes that the not-yet subject with its not-yet or no longer object maintains "itself" as the abject…. The subject discovers itself as the impossible separation/identity of the maternal body. It hates that body but only because it can't be free of it. That body—the body without border, the body out of which the abject subject came, is impossible" (p. 60).

Perceptual Markers for Representations of Ugly Objects

Ugliness exists in the experience of an object's pre-symbolic unknowability penetrating through the surface that makes it (feel) knowable, and this, it seems, is the essence of Witkin's spirituality. However, how can we use such a definition to intuit the presence of ugly objects in the artworks that follow? One answer is to identify processes *by which* this phenomenon of ugliness might unfold. In line with the commitment to avoiding a 'formula', the presence of these events can act as clues or heuristics for ugly objects in the artworks to be examined. Three potential signs this thesis suggests are 1) conceptual hybridisation through 2) loose, excessive, or abortive physical form or 3) contamination by other forces. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but conceptually interdependent.[81]

Before elaborating, an important distinction must be made between ugly objects and *representations of ugly objects in artwork*, because there is a debate about whether ugliness is lost in works of art – particularly in painting.[82] This "problem of sublimation" is most commonly cited when it comes to *ugly* representation in painting. Pop (2014) writes: "content is dependent on the form in a way that form is not dependent on the content, but only in the picture-making process" (p. 168). For him, one cannot say that Goya's *Los Caprichos* (Goya, 1797-1799) (Fig. 3-6) is

[81] Conceptual hybridisation occurs *through* amorphousness and contamination. Formlessness may *signal* contamination.

[82] Gracyk (2012) explains artistic representation as "two dimensional visual representations of a three-dimensional object or arrangements of objects" and further, that pictures, by definition, "provide two-dimensional visual content in visually depicting how something looks" (pp. 2-3). The Surrealist painter René Magritte wrote at the bottom of his painting of a pipe, *The Treachery of Images*, "This is not a pipe", to signal the difference between a representation of an object and the object itself (Magritte & Torczyner, 1994, pp. 3-4). Since these representations are created through the formal and material qualities of the artwork, because such qualities have their own aesthetic qualities, they can, in turn, affect the aesthetic of a something originally referenced or "copied into" the artwork. Maclagan (2005) writes that "no matter how realistic a painting is, or how impressive its subject-matter … it transforms and intensifies in its own particular ways" (p. 7).

"ugly" despite the fact that it references intrinsically "ugly" subject matter: the "form" of the prints is beautiful, and therefore, the artwork as a whole is not "ugly" (p. 168).[83]

Figure 3. Goya, *Capricho No. 49: Duendecitos (Hobgoblins),* 1799 (Widmer, 1972, n.p.)

Figure 4. Goya, *Capricho No. 64: Buen viaje (Bon voyage*) (Widmer, 1972, n.p.)

Figure 5. Goya, *Capricho No. 77: Unos a otros (What one does to the other)* (Widmer, 1972, n.p)

The perceptual criteria outlined below, stay with the object when it is represented, which deems them as reliable indicators of ugly objects in artwork. We can also look to whether the religious-painterly ideology of art historical style *prescribes* inclusion of ugliness into the painterly scene. It must be noted that there is an exceptional type of ugliness, which Brady (2010) calls the "inherently ugly", in which ugliness increases as the object becomes a more ideal version of its

[83] Pop (2014) references the point in his work on Bosenquat's *The Æsthetic Theory of Ugliness* (1889-1890). He cites the way in which Velasquez had to capture the ugliness of the Austrian royal family, the Habsburgs, so that they would be recognisable, while the painterly handling, and the accentuation of exquisite dress, made the painting itself beautiful (Bosenquat, 1880-1890, pp. 42-43, as cited in Pop, 2014, p. 168). Kuplen (2015) explores the way in which Frida Kahlo's painting, *Los Dos Frida* (1939), "skilfully beautifies the object with colours, lines and shades so that the disgusting depiction that remains is merely a shadow" (p. 139). In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1790), Kant, recognised that all ugly objects (for him, those that are "displeasing"), including "the Furies, diseases and devastations of war" could be made beautiful (transformed) with the exception of those that arouse "disgust" (*Ekel*) (1994, p. 131). For more on Kant's theory of ugliness, see, for example, Cohen (2013) and Thompson (1992). There are powerful accounts of the way in which paint and painterly representation can, indeed, embody the features of the ugly aesthetic, or accentuate the ugliness of the thing being represented. Kozloff (1970) writes about the paint of Francis Bacon, in its depiction of its "repellent subjects" (p. 163) as becoming "infected" with "pain" and "disease" (1970, p. 159). Likewise, he writes that Dubuffet's "humus" of paint has a "shaggy dog" quality of "anarchy and disorder" (pp. 66-67). In his paper *Idealism and Realism* (1917), Ruckstuhl calls this a form of "modernistic idealism" in which forms idealised or stylised downwards are thus "uglified below the ugly in nature" (Ruckstuhl, 1917, p. 256).

typology, such as "eels, spiders, ticks, mosquitoes, mudflats, muddy rivers and burnt forests" (p. 36). Here, perceptual signs may enhance the object's ugliness or be part of its very identity.

In this thesis, the ugly object is less of the object it needs to be in order to be a type of thing or a thing at all. In *conceptual hybridisation*, an object becomes uncategorisable through and therefore unknowable because it blurs the boundary of two or more conceptual prototypes, thereby referencing Kristeva's abject. For Kristeva, ugliness as abject is triggered by a "threshold state", e.g. life and death or human and non-human in the skin of milk, excrement or cadavers (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2-3), that becomes the signature subject matter in Witkin's work. This specific fear manifests outwardly, as objects of "abjection" are cordoned or fended off (abjected) in spatial, cultural and religious boundaries, which are exemplified in the exclusion of the ugly. Abjection is thus considered a "primer" of ritual, notions of taboo and sin. For example, "faeces, urine, vomit, pus, defilement, sewerage and muck" and the blood of an open wound (as used in the image of ugliness), are what is ejected from the living body, so that it is protected (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Menstrual blood, decay, disease and the corpse that put us on the "border of [our] condition as a living being are relegated as unclean and improper, perhaps 'profane'" (p. 3).[84]

Examples of this conceptual subversion are also found in descriptions of aesthetic properties which seem, as Beardsley put it, to be intuitive sub-types of ugliness. One instance is the fantastic hybrid being of the 'grotesque', such as the half-horse-half-woman of Witkin's *Night in a Small Town*, (1997) (Fig. 6). Connelly writes: "the grotesque may be better understood as 'trans-' modalities …" (Connelly, 2003, p. 4, as cited in *Žukauskienė* 2014, p. 195). Following the first self-object of the pre-symbolic, the essence of the uncanny, as psychoanalyst Rahimi (2013) suggests, presents us a violation of the concept of selfhood in various manifestations, from the 'doppelganger', ghosts, *de-ja-vu*, alter-ego, self-alienations, split-personhood, phantoms and twins (which

[84] It is notable that the relationship between ugliness and Kristeva's abject – here it is argued, that is, the ugly object is a *manifestation of* the abject – is reinforced by Pop (2014, p. 8), who argues that the 1980s style of "Abject Art", which "employed 'low' bodily products and their simulacra, from blood to sexual fluids, attempted to "get beyond mere aesthetic categories". It attempted to emphasise the importance of "aesthetic *experience*" and to expose the emptiness of conservative beauty theorists who simply want categories of the beautiful and the ordinary: "… an aesthetic theory that makes no room for ugliness cannot be any more complete than an ethics indifferent to evil, or a political theory unconcerned with injustice", as Rosenkranz puts it (p. 9). Douglas' classic anthropological text, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2015), is a precursor to Kristeva's concept of the 'abject'. It initiates an investigation into cultural notions of the clean and unclean and into purity, dirt, boundaries, pollution, fluid and waste.

transverse concepts of both self and no-self). We can see this in the masked head-conjoined womenin Witkin's *Siamese Twins, LA* (1988) (Fig. 7) or the two sides of a bilaterally severed head with interlocked lips in his *The Kiss* (1982) (Fig. 8).

Figure 6. Witkin, *Night in a Small Town*, 1997 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 7. Witkin, *Siamese Twins, LA*, 1988 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 8. Witkin, *The Kiss*, 1982 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

In the existence of *physical formlessness and excessive, loose and abortive form*, the ugly object is subject to the reality of the earthly – here it is impossible for objects to physically exist in the image of the conceptual ideal by which we categorise them as types. In Rosenkranz' (2011) writings, ugliness emerges where there is the amorphous "faintness of a boundary where a definite boundary would be *necessary*; the ambiguity of difference where difference *should* appear; the incomprehensibility of expression where expression *should* be" and "the absence of symmetry where we would *expect it* hurts us" (pp. 103-105). For Rosenkranz (2011), the persistent presence of a differentiated object, or meaningless overabundance, that itself, has no internal differentiation, is "intolerable" and therefore, felt to be ugly (p. 102): "Goethe's assertion on life, that nothing is less bearable than a series of good days, also applies to aesthetics. … Green is a beautiful colour, but only green, without the blue sky above, without glittering water between" is not. Rosenkranz goes on to assert that ugliness occurs when a boundary contradicts the notion of form, a kind of excessive 'fleshiness' (p. 102). As Hepburn (2010) writes: "Ornamentation, as superfluity and excess, can crowd the field, and thus induct ugliness into the apprehension of the object" (p. 216). The exposure of body fat is prominent in Witkin's work, for example, in the adipose rolls of a

reclining nude with a winged mask who sucks medical tubing in *Sanitarium* (1987) (Fig. 9), or in the rippled skin that ‘upholsters’ the oval upper arm of the angel-winged amputee in *The Bird of Quevada, New Mexico* (1982) (Fig. 10).

Figure 9. Witkin, *Sanitarium*, 1989 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 10. Witkin, *The Bird of Quevada, New Mexico*, 1982 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Ugliness also appears in the presence of "loose forms" – the "nebulous" and "undulating" (Nakas, 2014). These are prevalent in Witkin's inclusion of bleeding and decomposition. Nakas (2014) draws specific attention to the process of putrefaction and deliquescence to ugliness: images of liquidity, fluidity, humidity and of "matter changing or losing a given form" are felt to be "disfiguring and highly irritating". They deviate from "ethical and aesthetic standards at large" (Nakas, p. 186).[85] According to Hepburn (2010), it is also true that we can experience an absence of detail and ornamentation as ugly. Insufficient or lacking form – that fails to fill up the ideal configuration – is exemplified in Witkin's work by the presence of amputation in the absent-armed whitewashed Greek-sculpture man of the photograph entitled *Self-Portrait (Reminiscent of Portrait as a Vanité) New Mexico* (1994) (Fig. 11. It is also visible in the beheaded, seated nude wearing socks in *Man Without a Head* (1993) (Fig. 12).

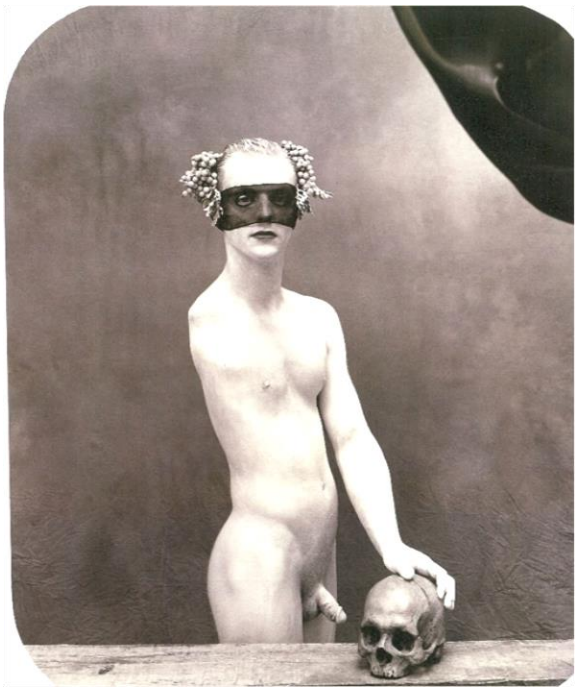

Figure 11. Witkin, *Self-Portrait (Reminiscent of Portrait as a Vanité) New Mexico*, 1994 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 12. Witkin, *Man Without Head*, 1993 (Witkin, 1998, n.p)

[85] Nakas alludes to the work of the German art historian Carl Justi, who writes on the amorphousness, 'form fatigue' and 'form hate' that are characteristic of Impressionism and Symbolism in the early 1900s, which linked it directly with ugliness: "One can tell from the idea of form being shaken off all-together, from an urge towards the Unformed and Ugly, finally from the inconsistent selection of improper forms that contradict the object's nature" (Justi, 1902 as cited in Nakas, 2014, p. 186).

Objects that have been '*touched' or 'marked' by other forces, such as sickness, decay and death*, hereby appear as less of themselves or what we think we know them as. Rosenkranz (2015) writes that illness results in ugliness because it results in "deformation of the skeleton" (p. 45). Witkin regularly uses and mixes types of skeletons as his subjects, as, for example, in the mix of horse/wildebeest and human bones in *Queer Saint* (1999*)* (Fig. 13) and *Cupid and Centaur in the Museum of Love* (1998) (Fig. 14). Rosenkranz describes exanthems and abscesses as "parasitic individuals" that constrict "the essence of the organism as a unity, and because of which it falls apart" (p. 45). In "[e]maciation", he writes, "a burning gaze, the pale or fever blushed cheeks … [t]he entire body in its transparent morbidity no longer means anything for itself, and has become through and through the expression of a spirit that is leaving, independent of nature" (p. 45). This echoes Witkin's own view that sickness exhibits the nebulousness of soul or spirit. He refers to the experience of photographing an HIV/AIDS victim who was close to death: "I believe that even if John was dead for a few moments, or even an hour, he [his soul] could see the picture … the energy and the people involved (Witkin, 1997, p. 57).

Witkin accentuates contamination of a distinct living object by the force of death through his *vanitas* still lives. They often mix fresh food with infectious decaying body parts: a head cadaver that bears a rectangular skull hollow acts as a vase for fresh flowers and is placed beside a bowl of salubrious Romanesco broccoli, radish, prickly pears and a glistening prawn in *Still Life, Marseilles* (1992) (Fig. 15). Miller (1997) captures the decomposition of forms of ugliness in his notion of "life-soup" of compost: "The having lived and the living unite to make up the organic world of generative rot – rank, smelling and upsetting to the touch. The gooey mud, the scummy pond are life-soup, fecundity itself: slimy, slippery, wiggling, teeming animal life (pp. 40-41). There is a "taking over" here, of Klein's formlessness, in what Miller (1997) calls the "proliferation of mindless mind forms" (p. 40), which colonise the identity of the object.

Figure 13. Witkin, *Queer Saint*, 1999 (Regan, 2001)

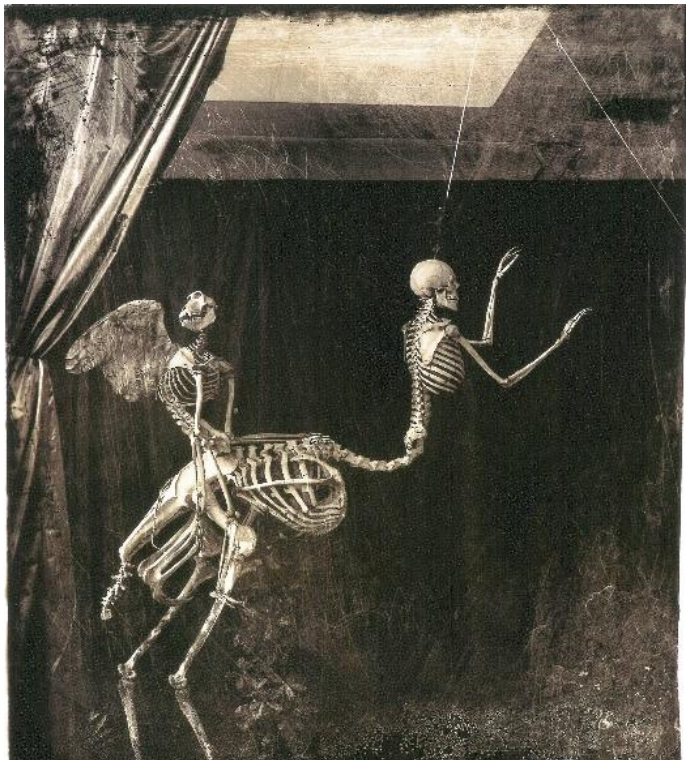

Figure 14. Witkin, *Cupid and Centaur in the Museum of Love, Marsaiiles*, 1998 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 15. Witkin, *Still Life, Marseilles*, 1992 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

The Ugly Place: The Geomorphological Metaphor

A second form of ugliness we will have to identify is that of the ugly place. Adumbrating such criteria does not involve defining the ugly aesthetic per se. Instead, it requires us to imagine, in a fantastical way, that there is a 'world' that can be created through the fictional possibilities of the alternative realm of the artwork: that Witkin helps us to see a 'habitat' in which objects arise, thrive or belong. As Coke (1985) writes: Witkin "first made sketches based on an image in his mind. When he found a subject that suited his preconceived notion … he would make detailed drawings of her in an environment he had already created" (p. 3). The conceptualisation of the ugly locale is necessary because the paintings of the Renaissance create mystical visions through images of heaven with ideal objects that rid the possibility of ugliness. If this thesis is to show that Witkin presents ugliness as an alternative form of mysticism, then it must demonstrate that the artist gives us a vision of an ugly environment and objects instead.

The link between ugliness and the pre-symbolic is valuable here because the pre-symbolic gives us a context and 'space' for the experience of ugliness. The experience of ugliness mimics, and can thus be thought of as, a residue or relic of the infant's non-perceptual and non-conceptual experience of objects in the period of the pre-symbolic (Klein's "paranoid-schizoid position",

Lacan's *hommelette*'s "Real" or Kristeva's "chôra"). However, given that there are, by definition, no discrete objects in this reality means that the ugly object conjures a memory of *all* objects (of reality) being ultimately formless, and thus unknowable. The explanation for this is that the ugly object occurs when formlessness breaks through form. This phenomenon mirrors (or even causes), the emergence of a memory of an entirely perceptually seamless and formless mode of consciousness through our perceptually organised reality that 'covers' it. This study argues that it is the experience of this alternative reality that Witkin presents as mystical through his presentation of ugliness.[86] According to psychoanalytic theory, the mind itself is modelled topographically, with its own organisation and layering.[87] If we were to depict the experience of ugliness as it occurs in this topographical diagram of the mind, then when the mind itself experienced ugliness, it would take on the formation of that very ugly object it was experiencing.[88] This representation means that we can imagine the ugly object as occurring in a mental pre-symbolic 'place'.

However, how can we identify the representation of this pre-symbolic space in Witkin's photographs? It is the geomorphological metaphor that helps us to make a link to this mechanism of ugliness in the object that is described below, and to describe a way in which this sight can evoke a similar action in the mind that experiences that ugly object. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2012) defines geomorphology as "[t]he branch of geology and physical geography concerned with the nature, origin, and development of the physical features of the earth's surface. Also: the physical features (landforms) of a particular region and the processes which affect them." The

[86] Adults who are diagnosed with 'psychotic' personality structures are preoccupied with the very boundary confusion instigated by the ugly experience, because they are 'stuck' at this developmental period. As McWilliams (1994) suggests, the concerns of the pre-symbolic period include "confusion between inside and outside experience … [where] … one can always find both mortal fear and dire confusion" (p.59). She cites Laing's (1965) idea of "ontological insecurity" (McWilliams, p. 59). Further, the psychological concept of "trauma" is an experience that is, by definition, irretrievable and unknowable (hidden beneath) because it is unrepresentable. In Caruth's seminal *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1995), the trauma is a wound or gap in the mental terrain of the mind, around which we can only talk or walk; around which we should sacredly remain silent.

[87] In his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud introduces his topographical model in order to introduce his idea of the "unconscious". The unconscious is represented *as if* it is spatially below what he calls the pre-conscious and conscious layers of the mind, because the unconscious mind is, by definition, 'beneath' these levels of awareness. It contains the repertoire of sexual and aggressive drives or wishes that are *hidden* or repressed because they are socially unacceptable or painful (Hook & Watts, 2002, p. 75). The pre-symbolic state occurs before repression exists, and therefore can be thought to be a whole developmental *mode of being* concealed in this unconscious, under the "adult" conscious mind. Since the experience itself is pre-linguistic, it cannot be retrieved and thought about in the form of representational objects of mature perception, and is thus, following the geomorphological metaphor, the amorphous experiential memory layer.

[88] This makes sense because of the "experiential claim": an experience of ugliness is simply a kind of occurrence in the mind.

"geomorphological metaphor" is a mixed metaphor in order to liken this mental occurrence to a kind of volcanic suppuration. As the biblical scholar Zornberg (2009) writes: "[T]he subterranean power that strains against the deceptively solid eggshell of earth's crust" (p. x).[89] Here, the "form" of the ugly object/the reality of forms can be imagined to be like an encrusted mantle, both hiding, holding or even signalling (representing) the truth of formless reality, that can be envisaged as the vaporous, malleable, mysterious underworld from which the world became. The formlessness of the molten rock, or liquid amorphous compound, is symbolic of a kind of bourgeoning memory in the mind of a primordial perceptive reality of ontological inchoateness. Above it – both encrusting and hiding that experience of non-differentiation – is the older, more readily accessible "post-symbolic" perceptual mode. Here, language allows us to distinguish the boundaries of things in the world, and to fit them within the bounds or parameters of a typological concept.

The geomorphological metaphor helps us to distil four features by which to identify the depiction of ugly pre-symbolic place in Witkin's ugly visionary mystical style: 1) the mental – as 'place' or 'store' of memory; 2) formlessness breaking through form; 3) beneathness breaking through aboveness (Cousins' (1994) "topographical" claim); and 4) older surfacing through newer. We explore the evocation of such features in the creation of the locale in the artwork in the formal qualities of the works that follow.

Ugly Feelings

Ugly feelings are the last form of ugliness that we must be able to identify in the artwork if we are to argue that Witkin's changes are in service of the argument for the ugly mystical – he sees elements of God mirrored in this prism of sensations.[90] Unlike the representation of ugly objects, ugly feelings are in the formal qualities of the artwork at large – the way it is *expressed.* Since the "felt" dimension of ugliness is part of what makes it an aesthetic experience, the expression of

[89] The geomorphological image used in this thesis is inspired by Zornberg's (2009) psychoanalytic interpretation of the verse "Deep calls unto deep" (Ps. 42:8), as in the "rabbinic unconscious" in the Old Testament. Zornberg writes: "The Hebrew word … rendered by the English "deep" is *tehom* – incomparably richer in association. This *tehom* – unfathomable void dense with watery voices – is one metaphor I'd like to explore. … The other is the volcanoes, also hidden, unknowable, heated beyond human imagining. Together these metaphors communicate the complexity of human unconscious life" (p. x).

[90] Following the definition of the "felt" in Chapter 1, the "feelings" expressed here are not merely emotions, which means that it may contradict traditional notions of expression.

ugly feelings in an artwork splits off the "felt" dimension of the "perceptive felt" aesthetic experience. In the mystical style of Catholic and Protestant Baroque, there is a mystical "felt" experience given in the formal qualities of the style, which Witkin must replace with an artistic representation of the feelings of ugliness in order to present ugliness as mystical. There are philosophical questions about this 'expression'. Here, we can say the photographer *transfers* the emotions he feels to the audience so that it may arouse the feelings in them or communicates these emotions so that the audience can apprehend then (Gracyk, 2012, p. 23).[91] This residue will be called the "feeling language" of Witkin's style.[92] Descriptions of the felt dimensions of ugliness overlap with those of the psychoanalytical pre-symbolic, thereby confirming this relationship. They present as a complex network that may occur in the ugly encounter as a state of ambiguous feelings concerning the unification with the mother or the undifferentiated world that exist in the pre-symbolic reality. Kristeva justifies the bifurcation of these sensations as those that have to do with repulsion by/avoidance of, and those of attraction to/approaching of it.

We need to show that Witkin's formal languages somehow capture feelings associated with being an indistinct object oneself – and merging with the undifferentiable matter of the pre-symbolic – appears as repulsive: the behavioural reaction of avoidance in repugnance or revulsion. The twentieth-century aesthetic theoretician Lipps' theory of *Einfühling* explains that when one "feels oneself" into the ugly object, we have a "negative form of empathy", which is a response of offence (Lipps, 1979, p. 377, as cited in Simpson, 2004, p.123). Cousins (1995a) discusses how the subject

[91] Gracyk (2012) covers the philosophical ideas concerning expression in art (pp. 22-44). A central debate has to do with whether expression entails to the self-expression of the artist or the arousal in the viewer. For Tolstoy (1996), there is a kind of infection of the emotion of the creator to the spectator – and the spectator must experience this emotion in order to understand that it is being expressed. This point is questionable, as it seems that someone can understand what is being expressed without fully feeling that range of emotion. This thesis therefore incorporates transference and communication as two conditions of expression. Collingwood's (1928) theory of expression also adds the insight that it is the artwork that brings the emotion to the consciousness of the artist (Gracyk, 2012, p. 29). Gracyk asks the question of how the artwork "expresses". One important idea is that of "metaphorical exemplification". He explains that for the philosopher, Kivy (1989), an artwork does not possess sadness but may mimic – through some configuration of its formal properties – the appearance of some living being who is angry. It is, therefore, 'angry-looking', as if the artwork has a persona. Following Gracyk, this demands that we show that Witkin's artwork possesses formal properties that 'hold' the feelings of ugliness because they make the artwork look as someone would with these feelings (Kivy, 1989 as cited in Gracyk, 2012, p. 29).

[92] It must be emphasised that the elements interpreted as part of the "feeling language" of Witkin's felt mystical experience, languages can dually be interpreted to form his visionary mystical style. These elements are analysed separately because they must be shown to respond appropriately to the styles of the original paintings in order to make an alternative case for ugliness. We can combine the perceptive elements of his style and the expressive felt ones, to say that Witkin's paintings present the *aesthetic* experience of ugliness (with both its perceptive and felt dimensions as the mystical experience).

tries to "clean it away, and when the object refuses to go, the subject retreats to a repertoire of acts of turning away, of hiding, and of vanishing … we block our eyes and turn away" (p. 5). The pre-symbolic is an older reality and is likely to be attributed to the most primitive of human emotions, that of fear. In fact, the very meaning of the word 'ugly' has its roots in the Old Norse, *ugglig*, "to be feared or dreaded" (Hepburn, 2010, p. 225). The art-theorist, Read (1965), confirms that "[u]gliness is a physical aspect of certain objects of horror, objects that inspire fear or terror" (p. 39). The neuroscientist, Kandel (2012), concurs that the images that the amygdala takes as that which is threatening, as being as ugly (pp. 390-391).

According to theories of the pre-symbolic, several types of fear exist, and the ugliness of Witkin's work should capture and trigger these. Klein and Kristeva mention the "death drive" that conjures fear of extinction or death: a state of 'not-being' that emerges in Klein's paranoid fear of projected, ricocheting unnameable 'stuff' that feels to be annihilating (Klein, 2017a, p. 60; Kristeva, 2002 p. 248). In this world of no separation, the total badness of this "object internal and externalised" may invade or attack, which is the source of the infant's schizoid attempt to "split off" this badness as a separate experience in the part object metonymy of the "bad breast". According to Lacan (2001) (and consequently Kristeva) the ugly object implicates our own ego's death in one's idea of oneself. Following Lacan's idea of the ego as the first *gestalt* object, Cousins (1994) argues that the experience of having the objects map onto idealised cognitive schemas mirrors a coherence and harmony within our experience of self (as the first object). McMullan (2010) writes that Cousins proposes that "the ugly object makes you realise that you are ugly" (p. 225). The ugly object instigates a primordial self-experience of the disintegration of Lacan's *hommelette*. It evokes the horror of the nameless thing that is sensed within the sensations of the self, but which is not grouped into a single percept/concept. Pomerance, playwright of *The Elephant Man*, writes that this ugliness "makes us think that he is deeply like ourselves. And yet we are not like each other" (Pomerance, 1991, p. 48, as cited in Cashmore, 2016, p. 28).[93] In evoking an asymbolia, the ugly object feels horrifyingly alienating and out-of-place. Ugliness, as this emergence of this "Real" into adult consciousness, is a surge of unable "mass"; this "[t]hing ... the spectral being ... linger[s] in the unconscious as that which cannot be named" (Levin, 2008, p. 3). As Carmichael

[93] Ehrenzweig (2013) explains that ugliness is found in the Dionysian, the Greek principle of chaos and wholeness of existence – when these "half-baked, half-inarticulate Dionysian forms are prematurely exposed to the glare of conscious perception" (p. 79).

(1972) writes, "Ultimate ugly is … a shaggy-dog experience; one escapes from it with a sense of absolute alienation, of being defeated at every level" (p. 498).

In addition, for both Lacan and Kristeva, the "archaic mother" is a source of life-provision, but also ego-diffusion and engulfment that renders the ugly object as close. Ugliness, as a form of the abject, threatens to infiltrate our ego "skin" boundary (derived from a view of our body-as-object), to lure us into an undifferentiated proto-self.[94] It is an invasion attached to fears of loss of autonomy in the union of mother/reality, of being "immobilised, paralysed, restricted, enveloped, overwhelmed, entrapped, imprisoned, smothered, or otherwise controlled by forces beyond our control" (Albrecht, 2012, para. 9). Cousins (1994) writes that the ugly object is "coming to get [you]" (p. 64), and that it threatens to contaminate a separate 'space' (resonant in Kristeva's description of social boundaries of the object).[95] As the composer Gagnebin says: "[U]gliness offends the senses but cannot be conjured away, ugliness strikes too close to the human subject (Gagnebin, 1984 as cited in Hepburn, 2010, p. 216). In line with this, Hepburn (2010) claims that "[w]hereas the beautiful is evanescent and remote; the ugly is never far from fleshiness …. [it is] as close as our own bodies" (p. 216). The fear of re-encountering the Real, the impetus for the construction of the illusion of the "sculptural fixity of the I" ties it to fears of mutilation – the loss of the integrity of any organ, body part or natural function. Ugliness is the wounding of the object as we know it; it is a threat of a return to the state of Klein's paranoid-schizoid "part objects".

The haptic nature of Lacan's (2001) *hommelette* and the evisceration of Kristeva's semiotic renders the disintegration as bodily. Since the body-self or ego-boundary is the first object, the fear of the emergence of the muteness of the Real connects intimately to fears of internal sensations of fragmentation of the self-object, which Witkin's style will be shown to conjure. In fact, Lacan (2001) describes the encounter with the Real through the same image as the "wound" in this mirror of self-object, to which Cousins (1994) refers in his description of the ugly object. Evans describes how "the anticipation of a synthetic ego is henceforth constantly threatened by his sense of the

[94] The "skin ego" is a term used by Anzieu (2016) to refer to that which contains, wraps, separates and synthesises the self or subject.

[95] This is evidenced in the politics of segregation, such as in the Ugly Laws of 1880s-1970s, in which anyone who was "diseased, maimed, mutilated or deformed, so as to be unsightly" was prohibited from physical spaces (Henderson, 2015, p. 30). Following the discussion in Chapter 1, Pop (2014) notes that ugliness is "one of the tools by which we organize the world" (p. 9).

hommelette fragmentation, which manifests itself in the images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, which haunt the human imagination" (Evans, 1995, as cited in Hook 2002, p. 166). For Lacan, losing one's bodily identity and being exposed to the sight of disjointed limbs (what he calls the *corpse morcele*), or of those "organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecution" (Lacan, 2001, p. 5) is a horrific reminder for an adult, of this time. They emerge in dreams or fantasies as dismemberment (Hook, 2002, p. 156).

The pleasurable feelings that attract us to the ugly object contradict the definition of the ugly object as the aesthetic of pain. Baudelaire explains in *Choix de maxims consolantes sur l'amor* (1846) that "[p]leasure in the face of ugliness comes from a mysterious feeling which is the thirst for the unknown and a taste for the horrible" (p. 222).[96] The experience of the ugly object is comforting for three reasons that must be simultaneously evoked by the symbolism and formal qualities that comprise Witkin's feeling-language. Firstly, the ugly object feels familiar, because it comes from a time before the self was "abjected". It is an 'abject object' because it represents a time when the world of objects was part of the object of the self. Secondly, "pre-symbolic" remnants remind us of the pleasurable dimension of unification with the mother, who provides us with a comforting stream of life-supply, such that we do not feel the pain of lacking and desiring. There is third insight offered in the application of the non-conceptual nature of pre-symbolic to the experience of the ugly object. Shock and horror are raw, visceral affectivity in response to the 'unthinkable' and 'unpresentable' ugly object. Yet this essential mysteriousness of that which is unthinkable, a felt, "semiotic", ugly object, means that ugliness offers a titillating intellectual stimulation. In his defence of Modernism, the art critic Gombrich (1953) writes that, in encountering ugliness, "our mind is set in motion like a squirrel in a cage" (as cited in Taylor, 2014, p. 43).[97] As Adams (1947) writes:

> What gives depth to the ugly experience is the viewer's desperate hope that at some level or another, he will find a rationale for it, in the form of a controlling intelligence. He lives in the purely ugly

[96] The question of ugliness, then, can be thought to form part of Hume's (1963) "paradox of tragedy" (pp. 221-230). Why do we take pleasure in artworks that portray pain?

[97] For Gombrich, the ugly art encounter breeds the 'sophisticated viewer' because it requires a kind of challenge and processing (perhaps of a non-conceptual object): a "chewing … it is the highbrow who prefers crunchy food, whereas the beginner is happy with sloppy mush." (Gombrich, 1952 as cited in Taylor, 2014, p. 66)

> as a dark labyrinth which absorbs his thought by continually standing at the ungainly, disconcerting angle, as if it were not to be grasped by thought at all – as it isn't (p. 68).

For these reasons, ugliness is frequently described as being interesting. Witkin writes: "The darkness within us sometimes is so dark that for me it becomes very fascinating" (as cited in Strauss, 2003, p. 51). The critic Kozloff (1984) confirms that this intrigue, characteristic of ugliness, exists in Witkin's work: "Curiosity and disbelief, regarding not only Witkin's motivations but those of his willing subjects, are obvious components in creating this almost involuntary sense of fascination felt by some otherwise horror-struck viewers" (as cited in Thall, 1993, para. 16). For Eco (2007), another reason for which ugly bodies are more interesting than beautiful ones is because ugliness knows no bounds – its variety of permutations in the earthly world is fascinating, in contrast to the singularity of an ideal. As Eco states: "[W]ith ugliness there is an infinity of formations that can take place – you can make a giant, a dwarf, you can make a man like Pinocchio with a long nose (as cited in Westall, 2007, para. 4).

This thesis will attempt to show that Witkin's work presents these experiences as part of an encounter with the Godly; an alternative to other forms of mysticism presented in art history. Now, with an understanding of how we may be able to identify these three forms of ugliness, we can go on to examine how Witkin selects appropriate forms of ugliness to insert in these paintings. He hereby replaces these representations of mystical experiences with a visual invocation of a mystical experience of the ugly. In the next chapter, we examine how Witkin creates a vision of the Godly world of ugliness to replace the vision of mystical heaven of the Renaissance. Conceptual hybridisation, physical formlessness (excessive, loose, abortive form), and objects touched by other forces, which withstand problems of ugly representation, are the means to identify the ugly objects in this formless, hidden, old geomorphological world of the pre-symbolic. In his response to the Baroque, formal elements of his style will be shown to express the feelings in the ugly encounter and replace other depicted mystical feelings. These include repulsion, fears of extinction, ego death, bodily disintegration, and proximity to the body and attractiveness, comfort, evisceration and captivating nature of the ugly object.

CHAPTER 3

UGLY MYSTICISM IN WITKIN'S REMAKES OF THE RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS OF *LEDA AND THE SWAN* (1515-1520) AND *THE BIRTH OF VENUS* (1485)

"What shakes the eye but the invisible?"

(Theodore Roethke, 1975, "The decision")

Using the insights from the last chapter, this chapter studies da Sesto's *Leda and the Swan* (da Sesto, 1515-1520) and Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485) and Witkin's remakes of these paintings, to evidence how Witkin uproots the Renaissance's negation of ugliness in depictions of sights of Godly reality, with a style that places ugliness as mystically central. The contemporary theologian, Brown (2004), writes that ideas of Godly experiences constellate around an "enchantment of place".[98] In the "Platonic Idealism" of the Renaissance, the spectator is given an *image* of a transcendent alternative reality in which God dwells with befitting-looking objects. Inspired by Plato's mystical image of a transcendent reality of perfect object forms, the Renaissance artist – this anointed figure or 'oracle' – paints a vista of a supernatural place beyond heavens. It contains ideal objects that are 'de-uglified' through the removal of perceptual signs of ugliness.[99] The chapter attempts to argue that, in his remakes, entitled *Leda* (Witkin, 1986) and the *Gods of Earth and Heaven* (Witkin, 1988), Witkin seems to actively place the pre-symbolic as the origin and residence of the ugly as a substitute and, through photography, captures objects with signs of extreme ugliness in their 'habitat'. It hereby argues that, through what it calls an "ugly perceptive (or geomorphological) style", Witkin rebels by becoming his own kind of "visionary" or sorcerer (Celant, 1995, p. 249), who makes a statement that he can "see it all" and "see God", in a conversely *ugly* world (Mullarkey, 1987, p. 107).[100]

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[98] This phrase is found in the blurb of Brown's book, entitled *God and the Enchantment of Place* (2004). Brown maintains that God can be experienced through cultural and artistic engagement – amongst other things.

[99] This idea of the mystical visual powers of the Renaissance artist comes from Bellori's 1664 lecture entitled "*L'Idea del pittore, dell scutore et del architetto* (The Idea of the Painter, The Sculptor and the Architect Chosen from the Beauties of Nature, Superior to Nature) (Bellori, 2005).

[100] It must be reiterated that Witkin's style at large presents ugly objects, ugly place, ugly formal feelings, all at once. However, in these two chapters, the elements of his "perceptual" ugly style, and his "felt" style are split. The perceptual elements of his style are examined as the changes made to the perceptual mystical style of Platonic Idealism of the Renaissance. The ugly "felt" elements of his "style" (some of which can also simultaneously be read as being "perceptual") are examined as the changes necessary to make ugliness central in amended versions of "felt" mystical styles of the Baroque.

Platonic Idealism: A Vision of a Transcendent Heaven Rid of Ugliness

In the paintings *Leda and the Swan* (da Sesto, 1485) (Fig. 16) and *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485) (Fig. 17), we can witness visual elements of the Renaissance style at work to create a painterly 'telescope' into Plato's world of Forms. We will argue that Witkin's changes to these paintings suggest that he senses that such paintings programme Christians to (mistakenly) flee from the spiritual 'impurity' of ugliness. Christians at the time of this art historical period took this Ancient Greek philosopher's account of the acquaintance with the non-physical essences of all things to provide to be a mystical description of an encounter with God.[101]

The Renaissance scholar and priest Ficino wrote that for man "[t]ime and space do not prevent him from going anywhere at any moment" (as cited in Huyghe, 1967a, p. 184). In these paintings, we are given an acquaintance with the Christian Platonic perfect structure of God, through a vision of a supernatural context and its concomitant ideal objects. Although, for the ancient Greek philosopher, this 'place' is a metaphysically separate reality, the process by which one arrives at it is mental – a 'hyperouranic' world of ideas. We can therefore argue that this renders the 'place elsewhere' as metaphor of a mystical *experience*, with its departure from the everyday quality of our stream of consciousness. Plato's actual texts that are taken by the Renaissance claim that there exists a transcendent reality in which these ideal, permanent versions of objects (Forms) are structures grasped through heightened intellectual engagement. It is linked to a mystical experience because these experienced Forms achieve their very perfection in their mirroring of what is called the Form of the Good/Beauty/Truth.[102] Renaissance Christian interpretations of Plato appropriate this as the ideal, omnipresent entity of God.[103] As Plato describes in his "Divided Line", it is through intellectual engagement (*dianoia*) with mathematics, and even higher-order philosophical reasoning (*noesis*), that one grasps the arcane overarching blueprint of the essences that distinguish the kinds of things of God's world. Within this acquaintance, one has a super-sensuous

[101] Indeed, it would be simplistic to reduce the Renaissance art historical style of painting's sole spiritual purpose.
[102] Things are more or less of a type of thing, depending on how they match up to this "ideal" picture. This appeared in a lecture entitled *L'idea dep pittore, dell acutore et del artitetto* (The Idea of the Painter, The Sculptor and the Architect chosen from the Beauties of Nature, Superior to Nature) ((Bellori, 2005).
[103] Here, in a neoclassical gesture, the mystical ideas of this Ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, are integrated into Christianity. For as, as Magee (1998) explains, "the Platonists were thought of as "Christians before Christ" (p. 29). The philosophical historian explains that Christianity sprouted within the period of Hellenism, and that many early Christian thinkers attempted to integrate Christianity and Platonism.

acquaintance with the Form of the Good (truth/Christian God, *Republic*, pp. 181-186).[104] The abstractness of these *conceptual* objects does not exist in our actual spatiotemporal world.[105]

Why is ugliness excluded in these pictures of the Godly locus? We could see the Renaissance Platonic Idealism as a style that creates a picture of our conceptual prototypes challenged by ugliness; a belief in the perfection of (our experience of) God is mirrored in the perfection of our abstract, ideal typologies. In fact, Godly universes are *inverse* to mystical images of the ugly world. Following his *Allegory of the Cave*, Plato sees encounters with material physical objects as analogous to the limitation of experiences of chained prisoners observing flickering shadows on the grotto wall. As a flawed physical instantiation of a perfect idea, an ugly object is the *illusionary* mirage of the divine order. In these paintings, we are comforted with the idea that our existing typological prototypes of objects do really represent the 'true' ontological blueprints for types of things in our world, and that their idealisation mirrors the ultimate perfection of God (Form of the Good) (514a–520a) – that we can *know* God in our thoughts. It is an intimacy and familiarity with a God that cannot be in physical incarnations that are ugly. In Witkin's ugly mysticism, God lies *outside* these very templates for ordering reality. This is, perhaps, because his perfection itself is inconceivable. Bailey (2017) notes that, through his artwork, the artist "forg[es] his way into uncharted territory" as a person wishing to find "something that they *can't fathom* but hope to see" (para. 9, italics added).

These mystical beliefs also demand that supernaturalism must be created to make perfection possible and to 'kill off' terrestrial ugliness, for "ugliness never transcends the physical" (Hepburn,

[104] See, more specifically, sections 509d-511c.

[105] Cohen (2006) helps us to locate the places in which *Phaedo* describes the characteristics and functions of the forms: "unchangeable (78c10-d9); eternal (79d2); intelligible, not perceptible (79a1-5); divine (80a3, b1); causes of being or 'The one over the many' (100c); Are unqualifiedly what their instances are only with qualification (75b)" (para. 10). Cohen also notes that in the Timeus, there is further elaboration of them being non-temporal (37e-38a); they do not become, they simply are (27d3-28a3) and the *Phaedrus* as them as non-spatial (247c,(para. 10). With this in mind, is the notion of the painterly image (*eikon*) – of spatiotemporal sensory perception of this invisible, eternal, *cerebral* (what is called "hyperouranic") epiphany– not paradoxical? Indeed, for Plato, the practice of art is antithetical to enlightenment, since, for Plato, the perception of actual things in physical reality (things that may be potentially ugly) is already illusionary (perception/*pistis*) – and art depicts that illusion (imagination/*eikrasia*) – as "doubly deceptive, for they are the illusionary semblances of [earthly] things that are illusionary semblances" (Magee, 1998, p. 29). However, in his eminent Renaissance lecture of 1664, Bellori anoints the artist with the power of Plato's philosopher.

2010, p. 219).[106] The ugly perceptual markers of Chapter 2 are *worldly* forces of time, or limited human conceptualisation, which create "ineluctable individuality, contingency and [a very] *resistance* to the ideal" that is Renaissance God (Cousins, 1994, p. 61). When the signs of earthly incarnation are removed, the object takes on inanimateness and ideality of a concept. In this version of mysticism, only such abiotic abstract ontological prototypes bear a perfection that adequately captures the pure perfection that is the essence of God.[107] Ruckstuhl (1917) writes that the painterly transformation of objects through Renaissance idealism "lifts the mind and soul above the commonplace" and is thus Godly (p. 253).[108]

Platonic Idealism, therefore, cultivates the site of an exemplary universe, by cultivating a supernatural world using appropriately Platonic 'de-uglifying' strategies of referential abstraction, sculptural geometricization, and mathematical principles, to give us an image of perfect and fictional exemplars of cerebral objects of Plato's eternal absolute Forms. It is significant to point out that this otherworldliness is, at the most basic level, intrinsic to painting as artwork. A painting cannot evidence that the scene it presents actually occurred, for there is always a *way* in which the artist paints. The very meaning of the painting resides in the interpretation of reality in a two-dimensional picture through the formal and material qualities from which da Sesto builds the representation (*Leda and the Swan*) as this oil on a wooden board.[109] Since, the representation subject matter is always presented in/by these representational qualities, paintings are *intrinsicall*y alternative realms that present different "way[s] of seeing" (Scruton, 1981, pp. 2-3).[110]

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[106] It is essential to acknowledge that theorists have debated the existence of a Form of the Ugly (White, 1979, p. 161). This possibility is heeded to in the concept of "intrinsic ugliness" mentioned in Chapter 1.

[107] This inverse relationship does not prove the beauty-ugly binary, because substantive aesthetic properties are not only perceptive, but also felt. The set of feelings of ugliness are not all perfectly "opposite" to beauty.

[108] Ruckstuhl (1917) describes idealism by detailing its choice of subject matter, and formal qualities that represent that subject matter depicted. Idealism in art means first, the choice of a subject dealing with things and activities above the commonplace in nature, and second, in the representation of the subject chosen, in such a manner as to indicate that the artist searched for and chose such forms as are universally regarded as the most perfect of their kind (pp. 254-255).

[109] da Sesto's painting is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's two paintings of the scene (1503-1510), which were lost with only the sketches remaining.

[110] For more on the nature of representation, see Gracyk (2012, pp. 1-18). For the purposes of this thesis, the conventional idea of resemblance will be said to pertain to representation: x represents y, because it looks like y. It is not, as Nelson Goodman (1976) puts it, a case of x being read in a pictorial symbol system. For Goodman, "no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference" (1976, p. 5, as cited in Gracyk, 2015, p. 7). The continuum of recognising the object as a 'thing' through resemblance or as a 'symbol' can be mapped onto corresponding representational ideologies. In realism, x represents y by virtue of resemblance. In both idealism and abstraction, a pictorial entity represents an object by operating in a symbolic language.

To begin with, the subject matter of da Sesto's painting is fantastical: it is based on the Greek myth in which Leda, who is seduced and raped by the king of the Greek gods, Zeus, in the guise of a swan, on the same night as she is impregnated by her husband, Tyndareus (Littleton, 2005).[111] These sexual acts result in her bearing two children from these men. She delivers the babies in large birds' eggs. This depiction of the story shows Leda caressing the flirtatious swan as she stands alongside her infants as they hatch from their shells (Littleton, 2005). Leda's rendezvous with the swan takes place on a plateau, raised before an extensive vista that extends into the distance. The meeting is staged in dense scenery in 'the middle of nowhere' with the sight of a medieval village on a hill. Beyond, are scattered tree-groves stretching far into the distance.

Through techniques of supernaturalism, da Sesto creates a nameless, suspended Eden, an instance of anti-ugly "beyond-earth-ideal" with its own/no physics (Brown Golden, 1996, p. 87). An infinite paradise is suggested through devices of spatial recession, such as of scale change, a vanishing point and of aerial perspective (Ruckstuhl, 1917, p. 53).[112] The disturbed, exaggerated size of the enormous egg and swan, relative to the woman, defies metrological norms. Light is manipulated to create this place of Plato's pervasive illuminative sun. The ground is stripped of shadows given by the distant solar source. Streaky rays of atmospheric refraction substituted with the suffused glowing yellow of illumination that touches the haloed hair of the cherub-children in the numinous

[111] Linda and Peter Murray's (1985) argument is that this association between Humanism and the non-divine is fallacious. It was not, as Murray and Murray explain, that the school of thinkers were choosing paganism over Christianity. They explain that the mythological and astrological interest in the Renaissance thinkers has led atheists to claim some of these figures as atheistic or neo-paganistic 'ancestry'. However, this is spurious since the Renaissance treated all 'classical' subject matter in *a Christian way*: "Even Botticelli's *Allegory of Spring* (c.1477-1482) has been shown to have a Christian interpretation, esoteric and elaborate as it might be" (pp. 10-11). For a groundbreaking survey of the transmission of pagan ideas and iconographies in the Renaissance, see Wind's *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (1980). [111] Through the use of polytheism, the Christian-Platonic mysticism is infused with a philosophy of "humanism" – "Man is as good as God [is] a theme for the artist" (Read, 1951, p. 27), and the perfected human being becomes a symbol of Godly power. The gods of the legends of Olympus take on human form and the virtuosity of the artist is seen to be god-like. Levey refers to Michelangelo's *David* (1504), saying "[he does not] require any miraculous help from God, it is he who is God" (Levey, 1974, p. 161).

[112] A vanishing point is the mark of disappearance or cessation of what can be seen in the distance and is used in linear perspectival rendering. Aerial perspective is the blurring effect mimicking the perception of seeing into the distance by depicting objects that are further away as less detailed, paler, and often in recessive, cooler colours than those closer to the eye.

penumbra. The soft blending of edges and of the light and shade through *sfumato* accentuate a "dense transparency of [still] air", a spiritual "infusing and vibrating" (Argan, 1967, p. 120).[113]

To create Plato's suitably idealized (and thus non-ugly) objects, the artist uses appropriately cerebral Platonic techniques of referential abstraction and sculptural geometricization to create the perfect painterly depictions of the volumes of unchangeably impeccable Forms. It is helpful to reiterate that these processes naturally extract ugly markers of conceptual hybridisation and insufficient or blemished corporeality. Visual abstraction demands that the woman, the swan, the eggs and the natural context are not, as in realism, a copy of any existing objects with their unique and actual specifications. Bellori seems to refer to this point in his distinguished Renaissance lecture of 1664, in which the biographer pronounces that the artist is a "seer of the abstract perfection of forms who gazes upon the eternal verities and reveals them to mortal men" (Bellori, 1664 as cited in Obsourne, 1986, p. 556).[114] Through a technique of referential abstraction, the artist gives impossible conceptual exemplars of 'womanhood', 'swanhood', and 'treehood'. He achieves this by using composites derived from the study of different objects of that kind: "he observes nature, mending it and integrating it with an example of beauty that does not come from sifting nature in whatever nature they wish to imitate, but through the selective and speculative sieve of the inner idea" (Wohl & Sedgwick, 2005, p. 10). As the prominent art historian Read (1951) puts it, he thereby eliminates the "deficiencies, excrescences and deformities of *individual*

[113] This, once again, reinforces the *Allegory of the Cave* as a theory advanced by Plato regarding human perception and the true nature of reality. The story is that of three prisoners, who, since birth, have been inside a cave and whose vision has been restricted to seeing only the wall in front of them. Shadows cast onto the wall of moving figures and objects before an outside fire become the only reality for these captives. One of these confident men, breaking free, recognises the ignorance resulting from this limited perception in contrast to the realm of sunlight. Plato likens those unlearned in the Theory of Forms to these prisoners. For him, light is a metaphor for human understanding and the conceptualisation of truth. Ignorance is represented by the remaining incarcerated men who have not seen the truth of the world. Following this, [113] *Sfumato* of the Renaissce (derived from the Italian "smoke") is the softening of the outlines by blending colours and tones to create "ethereal" haziness or melting together without perceptive edges of objects (Zirpolo, 2016, p. 454). It is as if a veil or dense air is placed between the painting and viewer. Oil painting enables this effect. *Sfumato* was developed by da Vinci in order to render an object without using an outline so that it felt unbounded.

[114] The seventeenth-century antiquarian Bellori provided one of the most seminal texts in the history and criticism of Western art in his *The Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1672). The first edition (1672) contained biographies of nine painters (Annibale, Agostino, Caracci, Boarocci, Caravaggio, Rubens, Van Dyck, Domenichino, Lanfranco and Poussin Carracci), the sculptors (François Duquesnoy and Alessandro Algardi), and one architect (Domenico Fotanana. Bellori knew these artists personally, and the book also contains significant details about the relationship between Rome and France. The introduction book provides a classist theory of art; it was presented as a lecture Academy of St Lukes, Rome in 1664 (Bellori, 2005).

things – that which is ugly …. [T]he abstract idea of the forms is more perfect than in actuality " (p.75)[115]

Figure 16. da Sesto, *Leda and the Swan*, 1505-1510 (Krén & Marx, 2006)

The Platonically inspired techniques of idealisation employed by da Sesto, in order to manifest such perfection of abstract exemplars, are those articulated by the early twentieth-century historian Wölfflin. Through a "linear style", objects are individually outlined and modelled in tone to make closed, separate, measured masses (Wölfflin, 1915, pp. 14-16).[116] Such techniques give way to an abiotic, impervious "petrification" or "sculpting" out of organic, corporeal substance,

[115] An example of this abstracting and essentialising process is described in Pliny's Encyclopaedia when in the creation of Helen's portrait for the Temple of Hera, Zeus is used as the idealising technique in which he chose the admirable features from five women and created a composite for her image (Pliny the Elder, AD 77-79, p. xxx, as cited in Osbourne, 1986, p. 5). Osbourne (1986) states that "similar stories are recorded by Cicero and others; that the method is referred to with approval by Alberti in his *De picture* (1436) and that the artist Durer said that he examined some 200 to 300 individuals for the ideal type of beauty" (p. 555).

[116] In *Principles of Art History* (1950), Heinrich Wölfflin distilled several criteria for defining the characteristics to be applied to the formal analysis of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Renaissance painting in contrast to those of the Baroque of the seventeenth century.

consistencies of objects of supple flesh or permeable tissue. For this empyrean locale, there is a "permanence and certitude" of eternal perfection that is foreign to material and mortal earth (Brown Golden, 1996, p. 87). Huyghe (1967b) writes that Renaissance painting was

> [u]sed to imitate the sharpest metal, and the hardest and most compact stone, and to give them a sort of excess of definition which confers a trenchant and in some respects, exaggerated response to form. A hard world of steel and flint dominates everything whose softness and fluidity might weaken the dominance of forms (p. 92).

An ovoid for the swan's head, spheres for Leda's breasts, ellipsoids for mountains, and cuboids for the parish, are the symmetrical building blocks of these calcified geometric beings, sealed with plaster with even colour for perpetuity. Both bird and woman exemplify "closed form". Despite the sinuous lines that describe the loose-limbed *contrapposto*-posed Venus, and the curving and twisting in the willowy-necked great bird, the boundaries of their forms are not broken by jutting appendages of gestural actions of the living. Instead, dynamism resides as contained within the streamlined volumes of the general structures. Even the playful cherubs are compacted and contained in a neat, triangular frame that harnesses their frolicking. There is an "absolute clarity" given to each object-form through an articulation of this colour and tone (that describes the light shining from the viewer's left), instead of a weaving together of overlapping elements into the greater whole of the painting. A horizontal-vertical axis grids an almost symmetrical arrangement of elements so that a repetitive rhythm of curves in Leda's full thighs and the bird's stomach and the 's' shaped swirling across the interlinked woman and bird create an all-pervasive compositional order (Editore & Conti, 1979, p. 31). Finally, da Sesto masks out any expression of vagarious human sentiment in this non-living world of formulated stone. Leda's visage remains austerely serene with partly closed-eyes, a frozen half-smile and gentle embracing of the animal after the bestial rape; this penetration of the worldly by the divine as a metaphor for the imposition of perfection on the existing-earthly in envisaging God's place.

Another mystical Renaissance painting controverted by Witkin, *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485), further evidences Platonic Idealism's strategies for ridding ugliness from Godly sites. For, as Hartt (1970) puts it, Botticelli is known as an artist "concerned less with the outer world … but

with the life of the spirit" (p. 270). His "exploration of the *unreal* was accompanied with the benefit of devices invented by the Renaissance to conquer the *real*" (p. 292, italics added). The narrative of Botticelli's emblematic work is also derived from Greek mythology and depicts the fantastical story of Aphrodite's arrival on the island of Cyprus (Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, becomes Venus in Roman mythology and is known as such in the Italian Renaissance). Legend has it that this goddess was magically spawned from the foam of her father Uranus, whose severed genitals were cast into the ocean by his rival son, Cronos (Hagen & Hagen, 2003, p. 35). Here, Venus is depicted floating miraculously forward on a large shell-boat in neverland. Other Pagan gods are present. To the spectators left in the upper-corner of the format, the god of the West-wind, Zephyrus, is winged and intertwined mid-air with the nymph Chloris, whom he abducts. She later transforms into Flora, goddess of flowers. With cheeks puffed out, Zephyrus blows Venus shoreward to be met by Flora, who personifies spring and rebirth (Hagen & Hagen, 2003, p. 96). Wearing myrtle as a necklace and a garment sprigged with cornflowers, Flora has a sash of red roses, as she is poised to cast a wafting, pink cloak onto the naked, approaching goddess. This ritual symbolises her transition between the spiritual and physical realms at birth (Hagen & Hagen, 2003, p. 95).

The sculptural quality that stiffens Venus in her relaxed *contrapposto* pose is also in the other figures, and in the surrounding context: the accompanying supple gods, the usually lithe trees in the grove are all chiselled into outlined shapes of a frontal view of a sculpture-in the-round.[117] Even the flowing garments become molded as masses. Geometric "renovation" of the otherwise ugly fleshy patina of the mortal body is apparent in the volumetric spheres, ovoids and cylinders of heads, breasts, limbs and tree trunks. Their outlines are painted-in with the medium of coagulating egg tempura. With its level finish given by a post-varnish gloss, it works out the appearance of ugly idiosyncratic biotic wear-and-tear with a durable surface-texture of silicone or protective plaster. The mathematically precise formations of the painting are enhanced by symmetry in the composition: there is a diagonal moving through the Zephyrus-Chloris couple on the left, and another by Flora lurching forward on the right of the centrally placed "s"-shaped form of Venus. Following Wölfflin, the ordering of these object masses creates a clarity absent in

[117] *Contrapposto* is the asymmetrical position of a standing on one foot such that shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs.

ordinary perceptual experience so that each typological prototype appears unnaturally well-fashioned to the eye of the spectator. Even the smaller "c" form details in the ocean, tresses of hair, and fabric-folds, are carved ridges. The mathematical proportions – derived from the classical Greeks Polyclitus and Praxiteles – create a perfect female form in Venus "the measurements of an equal distance between the breasts, between the navel and breasts and between the navel and the crotch" (Hagen and Hagen, 2003 p. 93).[118]

We are taken far away from our ordinary, ugly reality to meet God's perfection. An extraterrestrial space-lessness of what Read (1951) calls a "hyper-earth", is created through shallow space of limited planes. Without the use of recession of scale in the waves, the ocean becomes a shallow, tame pond on which to float or sail (even upon a shell on which one cannot sink or be tided astray). Sans shadow and perspective, the figures are effortlessly airborne in suspension or flight. The kempt hair and lavish outfits of the characters and Venus' porcelain body – unscathed after this voyage – are improbable in an incident of landing-on-shore after dangerous seafaring. Neatly-spaced violet snippets float across the painting's surface, as if to defy the laws of gravity.[119] Wet ocean and dry mounds of green lawn are sundered by a line-barricade: gone is any sign of a transitional coastline that might pose a threat of sandstorm and elemental injury or grazing by granular beach sand to these mannequins-deities.

[118] Polyclitus developed the formula for a perfect male body, called *Kalon*. As Lawton (2013) writes: "To govern a creative process shaping physical material, the Greek sculptor Polykleitos developed a sequentially proportional systematic canon to extract the whole human form in correct proportions from a single base figure. The method begins with one part, such as the last (distal) phalange of the little finger, treated as one side of a square. Rotating that square's diagonal gives a 1:√2 rectangle, suitable for the next (medial) phalange. The method is repeated to get the next phalange, then (using the whole finger) to get the palm; then using the whole hand to get the forearm to the elbow, then the forearm to get the upper arm" (para. 14-15).

[119] Violets are a symbol of modesty but were also used as love potions.

Figure 17. Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus,* 1485 (Krén & Marx, 2016)

The finish of marblesque, obdurate morphology of the imperishable inhabitants of this magical place, is imparted not only through the objects described, but also from Botticelli's allusion to valuable stones, which are both suggested in the images and through the use of precious pigment. The gesso-canvas is set with the robustness and extraordinariness of gems: "adorned with jewels and flowers clad in diaphanous drapery to show clearly that her eyes shine like precious stones, that her lips have the colour and perfume of roses" (Argan, 1967, p. 18). The foliage of the orange trees, Zephyrus' features, the veins of the shells and the spirals in the roses, are gilded with a gold-leaf luminosity of revelation (Hagen & Hagen, 2003, p. 97). There is the expensive, exotic pigment Lapus Lazuli, used in the blue cornflowers of Flora's dress, and embroidery of the cinnabar cloak that she holds, and in Zephyrus and Chloris' luscious ultramarine silk. They don this Godly place as Plato's everlasting kingdom reigning over earth; a power transferred to the deified power of the Medici merchant-wealth in Florence at that time.

The myth of Venus' birth depicted in this Platonically conceptualised artwork is Botticelli symbolising Christianity's own 'Platonic Ladder' or celestial pilgrimage (Gombrich, 1945).[120] The contemporary art-historian Mack (2002), explains that Venus' name is that of the brightest star (she is the goddess of physical and spiritual love) and that God's paradise of eternal salvation is

[120] Gombrich's essay *Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study of Neo Platonic Symbolism in his Circle* (1945) discusses Botticelli's commitment to Neo-Platonism.

believed to be located in the "sky of heavens" (pp. 225-226). For the philosopher Ficino, Venus "leads mortals to heaven" (Hagen & Hagen, 2003, p. 96).[121]

Ugly Mysticism: A Photographic Descent into the Geomorphological Mindscape of Ugliness

Witkin's "divine revolt" lies in his disruption of the "de-uglifying" strategies of place and form that we have seen to be used by Platonic Idealism, in order to express his alternative mysticism of ugliness. Through an analysis of his remakes, we can demonstrate that he achieves this debunking of this Godly transcendence by substituting the anti-ugly supernaturalism with the geomorphological underworld and the objects in that context, with those that bear perceptual markers of the ugly aesthetic. Indeed, as we have shown above, the Platonic Godly locale is inhospitable to ugliness, because ugliness is shown to occur through the acts of *natural* forces of mortal perceptual limitations of earthly instantiation – Witkin titles his book as well as his own version of Botticelli's painting as "The Gods of *Earth* and Heaven" (Witkin, 1989, italics added). As has been suggested above, the very idealised forms presented in the Renaissance are representations of conceptual schemas that become shattered in the geomorphological occurrence that takes place in the ugly objects of Witkin's world. However, within the geomorphological metaphor, there is the idea that the very experience of this ugly object is a 'portal' to *another* mode of perceptual experiencing – a numinous mode of seeing that is stowed as an experiential memory in the mental or psychic or in the phenomenological underworld.[122] In actual fact, we can posit that Witkin substitutes signs of the ugly place and ugly objects into his versions of Renaissance in order to present the 'otherworld' given to us in pre-symbolic seeing as an alternative form of acquaintance with the Godly. This revised picture of a Godly world is what Coke (1985) seems to be referring to in his reference to Witkin's "revitalised spiritual content" (p. 11).

[121] Hartt (1970) explains that Botticelli was commissioned to paint mythological subjects popular among Florentine patrons and that although his themes have had many interpretations, there is not one meaning that can be derived "from the same classical legends" (Hartt, 1970, p. 287). Hartt emphasises that "planetary personifications" had great power over human life and destiny, and that classical mythologies prevailed in the midst of Christianity, where the "allegorical closely paralleled that of Christian subjects" (Hartt, 1970, p. 289). Indeed, the mystical continued to reside in Renaissance artwork in Christian Italy of that period.

[122] Here, we can clarify a seeming paradox: the signs of ugliness are this-worldly; but the experience itself make it simultaneously otherworldly. The phenomenon of ugliness takes place because of spatiotemporal conditions that make perfect objects impossible – they are the signs that ugliness is unfolding in an object. However, its essential ontological originates from an earlier hidden [Godly] mental reality, in contrast to that of ordinary perception, and therefore takes us to an experiential "otherworld".

Let us first examine Witkin's replacement of the Renaissance idealised objects with versions that reflect the ugly aesthetic in the extreme: those that are strongly "perceptually marked" by loose/excessive/abortive form or conceptual hybridisation. In his remake of da Sesto's painting, which he calls *Leda*, the pristine enmarbled voluptuous woman is replaced by an emaciated transgender male dressed up as a female. The scrawny protagonist in this "Leda-drama" appears as if 'she' has had her body of flesh eaten away or atrophied by intrusive forces of ugliness, perhaps by disease. This character is heroic *human* God and an ugly multiply-hybridised being: a male-female, human-animal chimaera: bearing ram-horn ringlets, bird-horse-giraffe bowed legs, double-jointed and dark-nailed webbed-claws. She peers upward into space through a sheer eye-mask from a gaunt face with lipsticked mouth, and his tilted head dons a legal wig of a judge. Another object of the Renaissance original – the lean, tall curvilinear s-shape of the swan in da Sesto's version – is exchanged for a plump and excessively feathered duck, that is compressed into the squat form, and an into an oversized pillow it is propped on, to create one formlessly ugly, billowing and bulging lump. An oversized broken dinosaur-sized eggshell in the viewer's left feels shrapnel-cracked. It feels scratched by the ugly earthly forces of explosive pressure or gravitational impact, which is distinctly different from the petal-like edges of da Sesto's small ovals. The rigid cherubs of the Renaissance, comprised of ovoid and eclipse forms, are now a supine swollen infant with eyes balaclava-ed. Reeking of abortion or abandonment, they are befallen, as ugly objects are, by the spirit of death soon after birth. Witkin (1997) makes explicit that the physical mark of being touched or impurified by death is sacred: it is a testament to the robustness of terrestrial survival: "nothing is as boring as that which is okay" (p. 57). For Witkin, there is something spiritual about the way *some* thingless thing remains, *despite* the power of earthly corrosion (p. 97).[123]

The ugly perceptual markers that are identified in the objects of Witkin's *Leda* (Witkin, 1986) (Fig. 18) recur in the subject matter of his transmogrification of Botticelli's painting in his *Gods of Earth and Heaven* (Witkin, 1988) (Fig. 19). To create conceptual hybridity, Witkin plays with prototypes of real and unreal by transforming Botticelli's idyllic landscape, which becomes an ersatz theatre backdrop placed on a stage. Botticelli's waves are now hand-painted v-shaped waves

[123] He says this when referring to the photographing of HIV/AIDS victim, John, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Witkin describes how he believes that the man's formless soul would be elevated through the photographic process that immortalises him.

of a sea-scaped cloth, and his flowers stuck on several large, plastic blossom cut-outs. Venus stands on a stylized 'stage-set-mound' – in her familiar *contrapposto* stance – in front of a replica of Botticelli's pleated – concave disc – mollusc shell. Besides for this painterly cross-breeding, the theatrical-realistic, the emphatic makeup, long black hair, implant-scared breasts and male genitals make this Venus intersex, and thus an ugly amalgam/subversion of sex and gender prototypes.[124] Standing in profile, Flora is a transgender female. She holds a collared cape of stiff satin or taffeta appliqued and embroidered with flowers, that seems too heavy to be able to be tossed over the alighting Venus, to conceal her nakedness. Ugliness inheres in the way in which conservative sexual-orientation ideals are, too, challenged here: Zephyrus, Chloris are both gay 'boys' – locked together with swatches of fabric, seemingly suspended in flight as they enter from the wings of the stage, probably held by theatrical apparatus. There is also a cultural fluidity in this remake of what is archetypally Eurocentric: both Chloris and Flora bear ambiguously Asian, Hispanic, Mexican, and Native American thick hair, slanted eyes and darkened skin tone. Witkin adds an entombed, naked man beneath the stage-platform of a timber slab, to Botticelli's glass-slick sea. This *memento mori* in this *memento vivre* artwork is ambiguously alive (open-eyed, fresh-fleshed) and dead (buried, still). [125] The body is further perceptually marked by ugliness. Knifed by a long horizontal wound in this ugly, transitional state, it is susceptible to the external forces of immanent micro-biotic invasion in decomposition. [126]

[124] In fact, her unique gestures of one hand on her chest (instead of on a breast) and the other on her thigh (rather than placed over a lock of golden hair concealing her pudenda) show confident acceptance of herself – despite her backward, sideways cocked head that expresses her defensiveness in front of the camera.
[125] *Memento vivre* – Latin for "remember that you must live", is the opposite assertion to *momento mori*, "remember you must die".
[126] In his article *Botticelli Reimagined: The Adventure of Venus on Earth,* Wright (2016) describes Witkin's "photographic reenactment … with its transgender models" as a liberated message "as an up-to-date version", as "an avatar for our devotion, anxieties and agendas" (para. 17).

Figure 18. Witkin, *Leda, Los Angeles*, 1986 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 19. Witkin, *Gods of Earth and Heaven, Los Angeles* 1988 (Wright, 2016)

Witkin replaces the medium of painting with traditional analogue photography to capture the ugliness of these objects as they are, and therefore achieves confrontation with the ugliness of these objects that is impossible in Renaissance painting. Indeed, painting facilitates Platonic Idealism's concealment of ugliness because it can modify or invent the appearance of the object: the way in which objects are 'fixed' to make them ideal through an extrication of ugly blemishes is one example of this fictionalism.[127] Photographs are what Lowenstein (2007) calls a form of true realism, in that they do not renovate, transform or sublimate the ugly object in the act of representation. This is because it is the refraction of the object's light onto the camera, which partly makes its own representation. It is this mechanical process, by which, in the words of Scruton (1981) the (ugly) object *causes* the photographic representation of it. We thus believe the resulting photograph to evidence this Leda as having existed.[128] Sontag (1979) writes: "From a real body,

[127] The works under consideration in this thesis predate the use of digital photography, in which there is a diminishing of belief in the viewer of the authenticity of the photograph as a true replication of what actually existed. Our understanding of Witkin's works is that what we see in the photograph is what the artist witnessed and caught on film. We do not suspect manipulation by digital techniques because these are photochemical prints.

[128] Barthes (1984) writes that "the discovery, by chemists of silver halogens made it possible to "… recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object" (p. 81). On the *Chambre obscure ou Chambre* (vol. 3., 1975) in the great *Encyclopedie*, there appears an entry describing how the *camera obscura* produced the "highly amusing spectacle of images perfectly resembling objects in all their colours and movements". It would enable "anyone who does not know how to draw to imitate the appearance of this with great exactitude" (Hockney & Gayford, 2016, p. 216).

which was there, proceed radiations, which ultimately …. will touch me like the delayed rays of a star … light … here is a carnal medium" (p. 81). This insight implies that that Witkin defiantly enhances our confrontation with the ugliness of chimerical Leda, bulged duck, the decomposing corpse and the rest of the ugly objects in this scene, by drawing on the way in which the viewer "sees through" a photograph onto the (ugly) object as if it were an actual one (Walton, 1984, p. 252). The qualities inherent in photography as a medium do not only mimic normal perceptual experience more successfully than painting. The viewer also believes in this power to document with veracity because it is a machine – it is a "principal recording agent" (p. 184). A photograph is, in the words of Lowenstein, a "mimetic object" or surrogate possession of the (ugly) reality. In his *Camera Lucida* (1984), the twentieth century semiotician and literary theorist, Barthes, invests the photograph with such great power to replicate the experience of the original photographed object, that for him, the image is an "emanation" of the object (p. 24). It is as if the subject and representation are "laminated" together, such that neither object nor representation can exist without one another (p. 5).

Photography also disturbs the subterfuge of Renaissance idealisation by enhancing the ugliness of these objects. The fact that Witkin photographs these extreme forms of ugliness means that he intensifies this ugly-geomorphological experience of encountering that which is otherwise hidden – psychically and therefore socially. In other words, Witkin can be seen to draw on the genre of "oddity photography", because photographs enable the viewer to come face to face with what would otherwise be avoided, unencountered or socially sidelined because of ugliness' scariness and proclaimed badness.[129] As Garner (2003) writes, "the subject of [Witkin's] photographs, which seem literally beyond belief, are presented as photographic fact, and Witkin has exploited the documentary aspect of photography to increase the discomfort of the viewer" (p. 233). Following the geomorphological metaphor, the qualities of the mystical in the photograph do not conceal the effect of the ugly, as in the paintings he references, but reveal objects that Witkin presents as the source of mystical revelation. Evoking the historical resonances of circus performance, of "freaks" or rare "miracles of nature", Witkin's photographs therefore, remove

[129] It should be noted that while Witkin works in the oddity genre (which depicts the marginalized as medical pathology), this genre is by no means the only 'visuality of disability'. For example, Bender (2017) examines genres that illuminate the beauty of the intersex or "variant" body. Further, Bogdan (2012) examines "ordinary people photography", genre that attempts to normalize a disabled person by placing him in pleasant, mundane contexts.

"doubt from the population's beliefs concerning human oddities …. There was evidence that the phenomenon was real, and that if one bought a ticket to see it, one wouldn't be tricked or taken for a sucker" (Ostman, 1996, p. 122). The ugliness of these subjects prohibits the viewer from staring at them out of interest or in amazement in real life.[130] Beyst (2006) writes: "It is real humans that are photographed by Witkin and not merely self-created beings conjured up on the canvas, like those of Bacon (who merely let himself be inspired by photos)" (para. 21). Garner (2003) goes on to explain that Witkin's "models are real-life human beings displaying practices and deformities that one would never dare observe at length in everyday life, yet there they are, fixed in the photograph for contemplation" (p. 23).

While Witkin exploits the viewers trusting of the veracity of the photograph, he also draws on the simultaneous and potentially contradictory capacity of the photograph to amplify a sub-sensory ontological mysteriousness of ugliness – to enhance the thinglessness, identity-lessness and unknowability inherent in the experience of the ugly objects that appear in his reworked versions of these paintings. Here, there is an invalidation of the fictional idealism of Renaissance painting, which gives us a harmonious sense that the true essence of things in the world coheres to already-existing schemas. Perhaps this is the reason why Witkin refers to the camera as an updated spiritual device that supersedes the medium of painting used by visionaries of the Renaissance past: "[I]f Giotto and Fra Angelico were alive today, they'd be photographers" (as cited in Beem, 2008, para. 6). In her intersex signs and anthropomorphism, Witkin's Leda is less of a male/human she needs to be in order to be a male/human She does not fit into schemas, and is not, using the definition of ugliness given, any type of thing. Thus,following Aristotle metaphysical system, cannot be a thing at all. Parry writes that the artist believes that photography enhances this elusiveness; that the "[T]he camera is a sacred vessel through which pass rays of light to the ultimate *mysteries* of existence" (Witkin, 1998, as cited in Parry, 1998, p. 184, italics added). Schwenger (2000) echoes this point by referring to how Witkin's photographs of corpses call on Lacan's "metaphysics of the image" by redoubling the experience of the Real and *hommelette* in Lacan's "shattering of the

[130] The "visuality" of disability, as an instance of human ugliness, particularly in public spaces is explored at length by Garland-Thompson, in her *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (1996) where she argues that the freak show, in fact, encouraged acceptance and tolerance of the "anomalous". She goes further to examine the "emphatic curiousness and simultaneous 'othering'" communicated by the stare in *Staring: How we Look* (2009).

mirror image" (p. 400). This replication is what the photographer Arbus seems to mean in her claim: "A photograph is a secret about a secret … the more it tells you, the less you know" (as cited in Peres, 2013, p. 241).

In order to understand how Witkin's photographing of his ugly objects may make them uglier. However, we can draw on Barthes' (1984) explanation of the ways in which photographs help us to 'un-see' or 're-perceive' the identity of the objects. One reason that photographs may make the already-arcane ugly object more mysterious lies in Barthes idea that a photograph of a person *cannot* be said to represent that person, by merely replicating the physical form as it exists at a particular moment.[131] Schwenger (2000) writes that in Witkin's work, the image tends to surpass representation: in Blanchot's words, the image "tends to withdraw the object from understanding by maintaining the mobility of the resemblance which has nothing to resemble" (p. 408).[132] If we apply this formulation to *Leda* (1986) and the *God of Earth and Heaven* (1988), Witkin's artworks can be said to be representations of the people in the photographs if they capture and retain the unique inexpressible, nebulous "being" or "aire" … of the particular human being[s] whose external image[s] appear in the photographs (p. 408).[133] Unlike the paintings on which these photographs are based, in which techniques of idealising cast the subjects as anonymous prototypes of womanhood, Witkin's photographs insert geomorphological formlessness into the

[131] It must be noted that Barthes (1984) only addresses the photographic representation of subjects. The idea that inanimate objects have an "aire" may be supported by animism – the idea that all things have a soul.
[132] He draws also on Blanchot, who, unlike Lacan, recognises that Witkin's photographs of corpses (as forms of ugliness), draws us to the image of the object as the indispensable and only access point though we may have any 'object' at all: "[I]t is through the image that we try to make of the world a home for ourselves" (p. 401).
[133] Barthes (1984) illustrates this by recounting the personal story by which he sought to find a photograph that captured the "essence" of his deceased mother. He imagines a photograph of his mother embracing him would enliven a feeling of her within him "… the rumpled softness of her crepe de Chine and the perfume of her own rice powder" (p. 65). One zoomed-out picture of her despite showing him her gait and glow, did not give him a view of her face, and evoked nothing of the feeling of her. Indeed, Barthes does feel that he finds the "… truth of the face [he loved]" in the "Winter Garden Photograph" (p. 66). Here, he sees his mother at the age of five, standing alongside her brother, "united by the discord of her parents" (p. 69). In the photograph "the distinctiveness of her face, the naïve attitude of her head, the place she had docilely taken without neither showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression … all this constituted the figure of a sovereign innocence (… which is 'I do not harm')" (p. 69). As a further example, he explains the way in which her abstract kindness and gentleness are "nonetheless present in the face and revealed in the photograph …" (p. 69). For Barthes, following the words of Goddard, this is not "just an image, but a just image" (p. 170).

scenes by enhancing typological non-conformity. The nameless actors of these photographs, dressed in the guise of Renaissance subjects, become geomorphological non-persons.[134]

The other way in which Barthes' theories would suggest that a photograph adds an ugly-mysteriousness to the ugly object is that it draws attention to the very *time-bound* contingent nature of that form as it exists on earth, and therefore of the irrepresentability of the object's essence through that form. For Barthes (1984), the essence of the medium of photography is not its capacity to authenticate something as existing – the film theorist Bazin (1960) calls this the "mummy complex" (Bazin, 1960, as cited in Lowenstein, 2007, p. 155). It is instead to confirm that it *had* existed in such a form, at some time. Barthes focuses on the distinction between what he calls the *studium* and the *punctum*, of a photograph (p. 77). For him a good photograph does not only present a meaning that we can describe in terms of the subject matter – it does not only carry a political, linguistic, or cultural interpretation (that is the *studium*). Rather, the *studium* is disrupted by an element of "punctum" that "wounds, pricks or strikes like an arrow" (Lowenstein, 2007, p. 60). Although a photograph has a unique punctum, all photographs have what Barthes refers to as *noeme*, the "that-has-been", and he uses the word *intersum* to refer to "having-been-there" but "having-been-separated" (p. 77). Schwenger (2000) refers to this precise contradiction: "[T]he subject surreptitiously involves the belief that it is alive" (p. 79). We do not see photographs as copies of reality but as an emanation of a *past* reality. When a photograph is thrown away, a life goes with it. For Barthes, the "lacerating" effect – the effectiveness of a photograph – lies in its potential to remind us of ultimate physical demise. Following the perceptual theory of ugliness, it, therefore, reminds us of the formlessness that withstands the illusion of physical/conceptual form.

According to Barthes' theory, Witkin's work does not give us a "window" through which to see this taken-for-granted world. Instead, it mirrors an elusive *alternative* reality back (Barthes, 1984, p. 106).[135] In the same way in which Platonic Idealism gives us the "otherworld" with objects

[134] According to the online *Harper Collins Thesaurus* (2019), the word nameless means (1) having no name or known name; (2) not easy to describe, undefinable, and synonyms are unspeakable, unmentionable, indescribable, abominable, horrible, dreadful, appalling, shocking, awful, terrible, frightful, alarming, terrifying, harrowing, unnerving, fearful, fearsome, horrid, beastly.

[135] Barthes (1984) describes the photograph as impenetrable. It reflects reality as it is but gives us its own representational reality. In this way, it is like the *camera obscura* (dark passage) or pinhole image, which is a primitive drawing aid that made use of a prism and presented an inverted and reverse image (Barthes 1984, p. 106).

modified accordingly, the contemporary artist gives us *photographs* that, with the use of "punctum", pictures present the alternative realm of unthinkable non-objects of pre-symbolic experiencing. Schwenger (2000) writes: "When, through the image, we sense that region – for we cannot see it – we find words for it. No system of classification, no script is adequate; we falter, loose our place and fall silent" (p. 408). Schwenger refers to Witkin's corpses and other subjects as "altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more … mysterious than the thought of the innermost being, without signification yet summoning the depths of any possible meaning …" (p. 106).[136]

This otherworldliness extends to the way in which Witkin gives us journalistic admission to the world of marginalised "freaks" of the social underbelly of a psychological *terra incognita*, "through his photographs, he gives us the opportunity to infiltrate some *alien* land like an *undercover* agent" (Coke, 1985, p. 6, italics added). He gives us a glimpse of a "secret society" of an underground (p. 19), a "haunting [reflection] of a world that exists around the globe" (p. 18). It explains why Bailey (2017) refers to the artist as a kind of "visual Columbus", who uses photography to journey and witness the otherwise unimaginable "in the same way an explorer might climb a mountain or sail an unknown sea" (para. 9). Through his works, Witkin amplifies the elusiveness of ugliness, documents and verifies its existence and takes the viewer to the very pre-symbolic – which is his dwelling place of God. It is by escorting the viewer to the underground mental rooms of spiritual venues, that are 'designed' geomorphologically, that Witkin enables the viewer to 'see via' the artwork as if through a telescope or portal to this 'new way of seeing' that is an alternative to the Renaissance paradises of perfect forms (Walton, 1984, pp. 252-253). In direct contradiction to the illumination of Plato's sun, Witkin's presentation of the mysteriousness of objects brings "a message from that other place, the realm of *dark* things where different causalities rule and events signify in ways that we do not see clearly in broad daylight" (Stokes, 2009, p. 165, italics added). The pre-symbolic milieu that he brings into being in his artworks have the distinctive features of the geomorphological. We can identify the constructed pre-symbolic environments that replace Renaissance supernaturalism, and hold the ugly objects, through the four criteria of the geomorphological ugly "place". Those mentioned in the last chapter were: the

[136] This is a point made by Blanchot that is also referenced by Barthes (p. 106).

mental (as a place), formlessness (breaking through form), beneathness (emerging from aboveness), and older (entering the newer) in the style of Witkin's remakes.

In both photographs discussed here, Witkin uses visual cues to quash the idea that God is to be found in a parallel universe of the firmament; to point us rather to God in a *mental* place within ourselves: a memory of the reality of things given in the pre-symbolic.[137] He creates a "psychic" locus by limiting the gaze of the viewer through a square format to create a mental slide, which mimics the experience of watching a scene in one's mind's eye.[138] This frame differs from the illusionistic conventions of painting in which the images on the format create an impression of veristic looking onto the physical world. Witkin's use of the black border, within the frame, limits peripheral vision and evokes the inner experience of being contained, bordered and tapped by the boundaries of the skull. In his *God of Earth and Heaven* (Witkin, 1988), the folds of fabrics that fall around the actors encase them in meningeal convolutions. Instead of the light of Renaissance naturalistic environments, there is no source of illumination from the sun in this mostly shadow-less place of highly contrasted stark bodies and objects: the crinkly shell against which Venus is cast and the texture-less, pale cut-out shapes of Leda's droopy body, the unspeckled egg and the duck that is absent of feather-detail. Celant (1995) refers to the "oneiric" quality that is enhanced by the photographer's use of monochromatic black-and-white film (p.15). The use of exaggerated shallow space renders a world in which things feel suspended in an airless "head-vacuum". It lies in contrast to the divine and infinite sense of space and time in the heavens of the Renaissance, created through perspectival recession.

Indeed, Leda and the bird feel like embalmed thoughts, memories or symbols floating in an ominous preservation of semi-liquid formaldehyde or an airless vacuum: "the fluctuation of time and space in nightmares" (Coke, 1985 p. 6). With the recession of ordinary perception removed, we are given a world of limited "mental" space or storage. Witkin's use of painted backdrops, juxtaposed with "real" things, emphasises the flatness on which the illusion of depth is created.

[137] This resounds in the way in which the photographic surrealists used techniques to convey the half-dreaming hypnogenic perceptual experience, which is absent in normal veridical experiencing, though, for example, the use of multiple exposures, sandwich printing, montage effects or mirrors to create distortions, or the rayograph to create flattened ground (Krauss, 1981, p. 18).

[138] A photo slide is a mounted transparency intended for projection onto a screen through a slide projector enabling a photograph to be enlarged and is like a single frame of a film.

These provide clues to certify that Witkin 'shoots' in an indoor studio on an eleven-acre enclave in New Mexico; a place of psychic withdrawal to which he brings his "stuff" (Celant,1995, p. 54). Witkin writes: "I want to create an enclosure, take the best elements of what I perceived, and put them in that enclosure. The way I can direct things that were there already, that I could design and establish and reconstruct." (as cited in Metaxatos, 2004, p. 14).

Thus, instead of sculpting out volumes with geometrical precision, Witkin employs formal techniques to enhance the formlessness in pre-symbolic experiences of Godliness. At times identities are eradicated through blurring, created by careening movements of the camera or the subject.[139] Motion is the very force *erased* in the Renaissance to emphasise form, thereby creating ideal types. In *Leda*, Witkin scratches out the images on the negative with his own 'spirit entities'. We see drip-glue fingers and eyes drawn on the back of the cushion holding the duck. Here the photograph itself feels as if it is opening to give birth to the ghost-like *art brut* figure that Witkin has drawn. A zigzag moves through the composition, through the drapery, the skeletal body of the man, down to the bent knee of the infant and through the jagged edge of the eggshell. The scene opens itself up as a ghost-like reptilian tail, inviting Witkin to unleash the mystical creature from his mental world, his hand, and from beneath the scene of the photograph, using his etched, choppy mark-making. The large size of the paint-splattered egg evokes the presence of an ovipositor being ruptured. The movement, created compositionally and through gestural marks, is a sign of "opening up" the hidden violence and aggression of Zeus' bestial rape, that is sublimated in the stiff, zipped forms and tranquil appearance of the Renaissance version of "Christ's love". In *Gods of Earth and Heaven* (Witkin, 1988), scoring and lacerating onto the negative creates parallel lines crisscrossing the head of the entombed figure. They "swaddle" it in the indistinctiveness of a whirling nest.

In the Christianity of the Renaissance, God is located within a transcendent realm that is imagined to be a "higher" heaven (both superior and in the sky), that is a perfected version of earth. Witkin provides a version of an *under*ground from which the hidden ugly object surfaces from a subterranean psychic place, onto normal, adult perceptual experiencing. As such, Witkin's works

[139] Here, Witkin points to the intrinsic spirituality of the formless and evokes the 'spirit photography' of the late nineteenth century, in which photographers such as Mumler and Hudson used double exposures to create 'fake' spiritual entities on plates.

evoke qualities of the earth and archaeological digging and burial, which point to his 'alchemical' mysticism. Here, a mineral-rich ground acts as the place of the origin of all things: an ultimate universal substance after decomposition. A coffin and a cadaver appear at the bottom of the stage upon which he constructs his scene for his version of Botticelli's painting. Celant writes of the Witkin's chthonic as a place of the original birth of the soul and things, and thus as the sight of the regeneration. Here the spirit of the physically decayed is deposited and reconstituted in its new form:

> The quality conferred by encaustic and impasto of soil projects a petrified sense … in a terrible discovery, in which everything is transformed into relic and thing, into an unfathomable silence where the crust of the cosmos ceases to breathe as life substance. Here earth and mud are not regenerative but serve to rather fix and seal. They enter the photographer's body like a tomb … if the language of the images represents a return to earth, it also documents a descent into Hell, into Hades, where it frees the dead and brings them back into circulation (Celant, 1995, p. 13).

The secondary frame or circular shape in *Leda* is an example of how Witkin's works hold an organic shape within the square format of the photograph, to create a vignette. The artist describes his intention to "take the best elements of what [he] perceived" and to "put them in an enclosure" (Witkin, 1993, p. 11). This secondary shape suggests being a 'dug out' from the ground in which it exists; a catacomb that "stores" or "contains" the sacred ugly objects in the presence of Godly. Some of the photographs have squared-off edges and allude to buried pods, wombs, coffins, graves, mine shafts and mole holes. The photographs also feel touched and coloured by the earth – "unearthed" – so to speak. This is conveyed through the sepia tone of the work and the various terrestrial textures: speckles of grains of sand, mottled patches and the reticulations of humus and decay, light drops of water-damage and the yellow-brown flakes of rust and darker erosion fretting, corrosion pits or oxidation pigmentation. In *Leda,* the white droplets made on the surface of the photographic plate evoke diamonds or gems; Witkin sprinkles some of his photographs with gold dust to replicate the coruscations of metallic minerals in the opening of buried treasure. This alchemical preciousness reinforces the quality of the earthly being spiritual and mystical, as if excavated 'riches of truth'. Brian (1967) suggests that "alchemical magic" is evoked, as in the work of Rembrandt, where his "washing" things with a kind of liquid "brown silt" (p. 261). Indeed, it is this "soil" or "ground" that is medium for creation for the human progenitor, Adam. This

biblical substance of human origin thus seems imbued with the power to endow separate and singular objects as simultaneously sharing an all-consuming essence.

Plato's Godly sphere of unchangeably perfect forms is eternally still. However, like the innermost layers of the earth that are molten and unformed, the ugly experience has its origins within the deep, more primitive mode of perception of personal psychological time. There is an understanding of the world and the self as conceptual and perceptual forms, is a consciousness *above* the pre-symbolic. It is thus more accessible to awareness.[140] The dimension of *age* is also extended in ugliness to historical time: "regression" that is "personal" and "chronological" (Metaxatos, 2004, p. 5). The ugly object feels "prehistoric" from an evolutionary perspective because formlessness is associated with simplicity, harking back to the unicellular amoeba, underdeveloped reptilian brain or ancient tools and cave drawings. In fact, Adams (1991) writes of the "purposely grotesque effect" created by the "cavernously-shaped" inside-border and dolomite texture given by the blotches and scratches of these works. Stalactitic and stalagmitic growths of the cavern walls enclosing Leda, and the rotten, wooden plank sealing the catacomb beneath Venus (in *God of Earth and Heaven)* make these womb-like capsules, and to symbolise the communion with the Godly Creator as a kind of primeval "birth experience" in biblical genesis (Witkin, 1992, p. 11).

Apart from ageing his surfaces using chemicals, Witkin enhances the effect of oldness by his borrowing of stylistic devices and by making visual references to the development of early photography. Adams (1991) suggests the way in which the grotto-like quality that is evoked refers to the advent of photography: "[B]orn within the dark cave of the camera, photography offer[ed] a shimmering simulacrum of nature. The Grotto is the primal womb of art" (p. 206). Noble (2003) describes how Witkin's works alluded to early photography: "[O]n warm toned papers, and using a variety of toners, his prints often have a yellowish brown old-master look" (para. 2). There are also references to Photographic Symbolism, an early twentieth-century movement that attempted to secure photography as a "fine art" form. As the critic of modern art and photography Kozloff (1986) states:

[140] As articulated in Chapter 1, the psychoanalytic pre-symbolic theory is on the developmental continuum and is a description of newborns till the age of 18 months prior to the acquisition of language.

> the next and far more sophisticated *rapprochement* between photography and painting came about at the turn of the century. Mist-shrouded, unfocused, or chemically blurred photographs were attempts to sponge out the immediacy of the camera and to gain poetic resonance … aside from their period flavour, Steichen's prints of the sculpture of Rodin, for instance have a great delicacy and *mystery,* graininess of the photographic tissue becoming sensuous itself (p. 290, italics added).

The use of the standardised format, the way in which subjects are photographed nude and centrally posted, is reminiscent of 'freak' photography and the genre of "oddity" resurrects the oldness in photographic styles. Millet (2008) argues that, in this way, Witkin conjures a more spiritual time in history, before medical typology, when "monsters, or children born with physical defects such as congenital amputation, were said to be evidence of supernatural warnings, embodiments of divine intervention, or phenomena caused by the powers of the imagination" (p. 15).

Witkin's use of the indoor set-up as his context also references historic studio photography and its democratisation of the photographic portrait. His subjects do not show us an iconic Kodak smile. For example, Leda, with her head strained, looks upwards with a facial expression of discomfort and self-conscious Venus gazes away in the presence of the camera. Here there is a reference instead to the haunting stillness and frank, serious expressions of the people in the early twentieth-century portrait photographer Nadar's works. [141] This use of the repetitive format and the absence of colour in the photographs imbue this artist's work with the quality of stored or archival memories, of private moments in universal time.

Witkin expresses that his "life wish" is to be connected with a "place … [we] hope to go to, and hope to be". By changing the environments and the objects of two pre-eminent paintings of the Renaissance period, this artist rejects the idea of alternate reality seen in the exercising of the highest forms of abstract reasoning; an intellectual ascendance or transcendence to a place at the zenith. He does so by showing ugly objects of our immediate world as surfacing remnants and gateways to the deep recesses of his pre-historic mental reality, a sacred nadir accessed through an activity of psychic *descendence.* Instead of planting the presence in a celestial paradise of perfect

[141] Witkin's image of Helena Fourment recalls the pensive looks of the subjects of the nineteenth century studio photographer, Nadar. See, for example, The National Portrait Gallery's images of *Sarah Bernhardt* circa 1894-1907 or *Adelina Patti* (circa 1887) (Nadar, National Portrait Gallery, n.d.)

things that we can only imagine through cerebral exertion and which can be manifested through the very fictionalism of painting, Witkin gives God through the photographs these objects of our limited mortal circumstances. They are the conduit to Godly reality. These objects of extreme ugliness, otherwise hidden from view, offer us a portal into a time-bound world, which helps us to contrarily "un-see" that object qua its ontological categorisation, in the same way that the uniqueness of the ugly object pushes the viewer outside the intelligible world of sortable objects. This a not a picture of a world in far remove. It is a vignette of a universe inside of us, an experience once had. This is a way of perceiving that is retrievable, and, as will be further elaborated, mirrors the mysterious formlessness of God, instead of his ideality. Here, ugliness can provide illuminative 'seeing'. However, Witkin also presents us with the idea that such a mystical aesthetic experience also has an extra dimension of feeling. We explore the expression of these 'feelings' in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 4

UGLY FEELINGS IN WITKIN'S REMAKES OF THE BAROQUE PAINTINGS OF *HET PELSKEN (LITTLE FUR)* (1938) AND *STILL LIFE OF GAME, FISH, FRUIT AND KITCHEN UTENSILS* (1646)

> Saints have loved the darkness because that's where they go to bring out people who are drowning. When I, as an individual, continue my journey into perception and better realities, I have to engage a person in darkness because I am in darkness. … You have to go to darkness to come out in the light (Witkin as cited in Cravens, 1993, p. 58).

This chapter first applies the description of pre-symbolic ugly feelings to examine *Little Fur* (Rubens) (1638), and *Still Life of Game, Fish and Kitchen Utensils* (van Steenwyck, 1646), and then to Witkin's remakes of these paintings, in order to evidence how the artist replaces the different kinds of mystical feelings given in the Catholic and Protestant Baroque with his style that, instead, presents ugly affects as mystical. In addition to commenting on the perceptive mystical style of Platonic Idealism, Witkin dialogues with these portrayals of the Godly as a divine sensation. These experiences take place from the immanent 'this-world', such that the ugly object becomes a departure point, trigger or site for the engagement of a 'feeling-state'. What this thesis calls Catholic Baroque's "Theatrical Realism", involves a cultivating of the heightened emotion activated by the commonplace subject in a depiction of Godly communion. Further, in the Protestant Baroque's so-called "Mindful *Vanitas*", there is a superimposition of focused, meditative awareness of the ugly object to realise its Godly spirit. Through an examination of two works, *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment* (Witkin, 1984) and *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990), and by means of exploration of his own geomorphological expressive process, the chapter elucidates how Witkin replaces these visual elements with ones that evoke the array of feelings in response to the ugly-pre-symbolic object: this Ultimate reality. It hereby makes the argument that Witkin's "divine revolt" consists of redirecting the viewer into an immersion *into* the feelings of the ugly object for contact with the Godly.

Theatrical Realism and Mindful *Vanitas*: Feeling Godliness from the Ugly Object

In order to show that Witkin's amendments to the Baroque's paintings of *Little Fur* and *Still Life of Game, Fish and Kitchen Utensils* serve to promote the mysticism of ugly feelings, we need to demonstrate how mystical expression is inherent in Baroque art historical style. Unlike Platonic Idealism, what this thesis calls Catholic Baroque "Theatrical Realism' and Mindful Flemish Baroque *vanitas* mystical forms, converge with ugly mysticism in their inclusion of the ugly object within their definition of the mystical experience. What is significant is that these styles are not "visionary" as in Platonic Idealism, with the artist as an inspired imagistic clairvoyant. Rather, they are "evocative"; feelings of the mystical are transposed by the artist onto the scene that faithfully mimics ordinary perception of the everyday world with all its ugliness. Notably the contemporary art historian Schama has referred to this shift in his description of the movement from the Renaissance's "idealisation of nature" to the Baroque's "naturalisation of the ideal" (Schama, 2009, p. 28). In contrast to the utopias of the Renaissance and their idealised objects, the realism of both these styles includes "subject matter dealing with things and human activities which are commonplace of nature" and the representation of the forms of nature in a subject chosen, by imitating those forms with the utmost truth to nature" (Ruckstuhl, 1917, p. 254).

Given this, against what is Witkin rebelling when he remakes these works in his distinctive style? Whereas the changes this artist makes to Renaissance painting suggest that he is critical of ugliness' exclusion in Godly panorama, Witkin's changes to Baroque evidence his opposition to its inclusion as a mere catalyst for emotion. The analysis of the two paintings below demonstrates how theatrical or mindful qualities are inserted over or into the realistic depiction so that the ugly object becomes only instrumental for the engagement of these other "feeling-states" that give acquaintance with the Godly presence. This interpretation is the basis with which to argue that Witkin's replacement of these qualities with those that capture ugly feelings are a form of supporting ugly mysticism.

Rubens' *The Little Fur* (Rubens, 1638) (Fig. 23) – which is remade by Witkin in his *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment* (1984) (Fig. 25) – is an example of the way in which paintings of the Catholic Baroque convey the mystical in the heightened emotion (theatricality) of the corporeal

human being who is subject to ugliness (realism). In Rubens' painting, it is not the artist's 16-year-old wife Helena, standing half-clothed in the artist's fur coat, who connects with God. Instead, the artist inserts sensual theatrical qualities in this scene, to convey *his own* numinous feelings – which can be interpreted as mysticism in heightened eroticism – within this sight. Caught in a snapshot moment, as the young woman emerges from bathing, Rubens documents Helena in the stance of the *Venus Pudica* pose of modesty, in which one hand covers her pelvic area as she seems to step forward, glancing momentarily at the artist, to form a serpentine "S" shape.[142] Nude, but for a fur robe, ribbon hair-accessories in her tousled brown mop and a single pearl earring, she stands angled to the painter, on a vermillion fabric surface, behind a small tasselled, upholstered footstool, of the same bright colour as the floor. She seems to be wrapping herself in a flimsy white garment and heavy fur robe that she holds in such a way that both arms cross over her torso: she pushes up her breasts in the crook of one arm as the other clasps the fluffy cape. The adolescent muse appears to be both provocative and anxious – perhaps only impatient – in her need to cover her exposed body from the cold draught and from the gaze of her husband who paints her.[143]

Here, there is an expressive, sensual numinosity that emanates from ugliness, but which, as we learn through Witkin's work, detracts from direct, candid contact with ugliness. This idea of the escape elsewhere through an incendiary emotional intensity is one contextualised within the Counter-Reformation's campaign to democratise Christianity and appeal to all Christians as candidates for mystical connection.[144] In this context, the viewer is reconceived in a new Catholicism, broadened and democratised, to include communication with the poor and illiterate: the 'populace' who served God from earth and are included as part of its ugliness (Huyghe,

[142] *Venus Pudica* is a convention used in historical Greek and Roman sculpture and is appropriated by Rubens for his posing of Helena.

[143] It must be noted that this is not a characteristic street scene but is rather a documentation of the aristocracy. Despite its intention to appeal to the everyman, the style is employed to confer Godly powers to an increasingly powerful royalty and *aristocracy*. In fact, in paintings that are referenced by Witkin, the pictorial language of mysticism is appropriated in such a way that one is made to feel as if one meets God, in the presence of characters from the courts. Here, techniques that encourage spiritual witnessing are replaced with an intention to impress and instate awe, through the drama of over-the-top ostentation, in overwrought *extravagance*, decoration and ornamentation (Conti, 1979, pp. 16-17). This is most strongly epitomised in the 37,000 arced Palace of Versailles Louis XIV, the "Le Roi Soleil" (Sun King). For these reasons, the word "baroque", which bears its origin in the Portuguese *baraco*, meaning irregular pearl, takes on another meaning as an aesthetic term, which describes the baroque as the "heroic sweep", "opulence", "magnificence", "pomp", and "extravagance" (Heyl, 1961, p. 227).

[144] The Catholic Baroque is mostly set in Italy; Rubens' work is characteristic of this style, although he is Flemish.

1967b).[145]As Schama (2009) explains, the realistic inclusion of the everyday [ugly] person in these works served to communicate "the possibility of redemption coming to the most unlikely and hardened sinner" (p. 42), thereby affirming the "personal worth and equality of any beggar" (Aznar, 1967, p. 234).[146] Unlike the Renaissance *secchezza* (dryness), this portrayal of an emotional connection with God, further makes mystical experiences accessible to the uneducated or illiterate. As Clark (1969) writes: "The art of the Renaissance had appealed through intellectual means – geometry, perspective, knowledge of antiquity – to a small group of humanists. Yet, the Baroque appealed propogandistically *through emotions,* "appealed to man's deepest responses" (Huyghe, 1967b, p. 330). In so doing it aimed at appealing to the widest possible audience, "winning back heretics or at least on consolidating the faith of the believers" (Conti, 1979, p. 4). Baroque art thus became a pastoral guide of the masses inspired by the accessibility of Jesuit *Spiritual Exercises* of that time (Curran, 1940). [147]

In some artworks of this period, there are scenes of the Godly *being experienced by* realistically portrayed human beings, and an attempt to induce that very feeling state into the viewer through theatrical techniques. Aspiring to excite the "beholder in his personal life… it came closer to the life of the people, laying stress on the saints, who were accessible intermediaries of the Godhead." (Huyghe, 1967b, p. 330). For example, Bernini's sculpture *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* (1642) (Fig. 20) represents "in an intensely emotional fashion, a saint in a state of mystical trance, helpless and swooning at the awful realization of divinity", and portrays, as its very subject matter, the

[145] This agenda included reaffirming the true and honest values of Catholicism in its rebellion against Protestantism (Huyghe, 1967b, p. 330).
[146] Michelangelo Merisi (Caravaggio) is known for his stark realism in which he painted poor models in their everyday clothes and rejected the mannered conventions deployed to depict religious scenes, e.g. the elderly man with dirty feet as Saint Peter in *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1601).
[147] These meditative and completive rituals were developed by the mystic Saint Ignatius of Loyola and encouraged an attunement of the senses to facilitate deepening one's relationship with God to serve him further (the concept of *Magis*) (Barrett, 1956). According to Wittkowwer (1956), the purpose of these exercises is to provide "a vivid apprehension of any given subject for meditation by an extremely vivid appeal to the senses …" (as cited in Barrett, 1956, p. 336). Jesuit art reinforced itself on Baroque art through a "emotional appeal, so that Baroque became an irrepressible energy, dominating material, exploring space and striving after its fashion for the infinite" (Curran, 1940, p. 357). The Jesuits, an order founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola, were dedicated to the revitalisation of Roman Catholicism. For 70 years it was the primary force of the Counter Reformation. Interested in the intellectual and artistic traditions of Classical Antiquity and Christianity, the Jesuits promulgated their beliefs by encouraging engagement in the arts.

"psychology of ecstasy and trance" (Martin, 1955, p. 164).[148] This may be categorised as Gellman's (2017) subtype of mystical experience in which there is a kind of "union with God", involving a feeling of being "carried away" beyond oneself so that one can be enveloped into an infinitude; the Christian Holy Spirit (para. 24).

Figure 20. Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 1642 (Wikipedia Commons, 2006)

This reading of an apparently secular scene's representing an erotic mysticism, is informed by the way that Wedgewood (1982) interprets Rubens as referencing the biblical Bathsheba. In this story, King David's desire for this woman, as she bathed on the palace roof, resulted in her pregnancy and her bearing Solomon. As a prominent painter for the Catholic church, royal courts, aristocratic

[148] More specifically, incidences of martyrdom and death (in which extreme states induced by mortal suffering makes visible the Godly), are often re-enacted in the Baroque: "The unspeakable agony of dismemberment, the intense grief and horror of the onlookers, the feral cruelty of the executioners, these things, we are compelled to admit, are the real subject of many a Baroque martyrdom" (Martin, 1955, p 164).

and merchant classes, the realism of Rubens integrated religiosity with portraiture. Rubens uses the same style as he employs for mythological and religious narratives to depict an intimate bedroom encounter so that the erotic Bathsheba is presented in the guise of this flesh-and-blood woman. In this way, the technical devices used in invoking the presence of the mystical in classical and religious stories (e.g. in his *Venus at the Mirror,* 1613–14, or *Susanna and the Elders*, 1608) (Fig. 21 & 22) are transferred and used to invoke the feelings that are inherent in the mystical to the mundane.[149] As a matter of fact, a macro x-ray fluorescence scan of the painting exposes a fountain emanating from a lion's head, and boy's genitals in the background, uncovering a lasciviousness that was literally concealed by Rubens.[150]

Figure 21. Rubens, *Venus at the Mirror,* 1613-1614, (Krén & Marx, 2006)

Figure 22. Rubens, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1608 (Krén & Marx, 2006)

[149] This is inspired by Caravaggio's work, which presents street personas or scenes *as if* they are biblical incidences. In his *The Calling of St Matthew* (1599-1600), he is not presenting a portrait of St Matthew upon his meeting of him but presents the character St Matthew *in the guise of a* peasant with dirty feet, which he selected to copy for the purposes of allegory (Schama, 2009, p. 23).

[150] Baroque painting has been given extra significance by macro x-ray fluorescence scanning done at the University of Antwerp, which gives a view of the underneath layers of paint. Through the use of these processes, researchers van der Snickt, Legrand, Slama, Van Zuien, Gruber and Van der Stighelen (2018) were able to see that on Helena's right, is a clandestine sculpted lion's head from which water spouted, and above it, a sculpture of a urinating boy. The urination alludes to Bacchus: a metaphor for an absence of control and sexual union, subverting the boundaries of acceptable "societal code" (Vanthienen, 2018).

In addition to the use of actual subject matter, i.e. the ugly, painterly realism involves the representing of this woman as she actually looks: a *trompe l'oeil* or "tricking of the eye" (Ruckstuhl, 1917, pp. 253-254).[151] In other words, Rubens uses visual devices to convey the perceptual markers of ugliness in this person of the real world. The painting employs the pictorial principles articulated by Wölfflin (1915) in his analysis of the Baroque.[152] In contrast to the sculptural forms of the Renaissance, the highlighting of the ugly perceptual markers of the fleshiness of her form is achieved through attention to conveying her mottled, dimpled skin thereby displaying the wish to "identify with life at its most authentic" (Huyghe, 1967b, p. 330). In Wölfflin's "painterly style", the 'wobbly' flaccidity of this form of her body is created by the replacement of the rigid outlining of the volume with the application of the 'screen-and-passage' technique – Rubens makes her a flesh-and-blood woman by refraining from tightening her body and smoothing it down. Here, parts of objects contrast with their backgrounds, while others blend with it through tonal similarity or intense light contrast or *chiaroscuro.*[153] Helena's pale, opalescent skin is set off against the darkness of the background, while her hair and the fur and fabric meld with it. She stands askew to the picture plane so there is foreshortening in her corpulent arms and legs, her forearms, her angled bunion-feet, hunched shoulders and non-frontal face, which create ugly malformation through asymmetry. The vulnerability and permeability of this 'wonky', knobby and soft body are accentuated by 'recessive space' emphasised by the perspective in the stool and in the floor. A further sense of ugly formlessness or 'spilling out of the sculptural' is evoked through the way in which the fur coat simultaneously blends with the shadowy space and flounces close to Helena's body, thereby creating Wölfflin's "open form" and alluding to ugly animal-woman typological ambiguity. This woman is susceptible to being 'touched by' time: the

[151] There are two degrees of this realism as described by Ruckstuhl (1917). The first is that, in the Baroque, there is a faithful commitment to capturing, in the painting, what is perceived by the eye in reality, of recording a true visual experience of this world. In this sense, it is antithetical to idealism. However, it must be noted that the realism of the Baroque is not a 'naturalism' (different from Ruckstuhl's "naturalistic idealism"), as Schama (2009) casually describes. In naturalism, it is the *beauty* of the natural world that is selected to be preserved in the painting for admiration (perhaps in an almost romantic gesture). Rather, the Baroque is committed to recording, and portraying *all* aspects of reality, irrespective of their aesthetic quality. This is particularly true with the choice of the human subject – the poor, sickly, and street dwellers – in short, the ugly, are given full importance for it is to the *populis* to which the church wishes to appeal.

[152] This explanation is found alongside the principles of the Renaissance used in the last chapter, as *Principles of Art History* (1950) is, indeed, an analysis of the pictorial shifts that occur from the Renaissance to the Baroque.

[153] *Chiaroscuro* is the technical term used to describe the contrast of light and shadow employed to achieve modelling and a dramatic effect.

angled stance, the slippery s-shape and her slightly raised right foot creates suspended movement with the potential to shift in an instant.

Rubens uses realism to enhance the distracting drama of sensual contact with ugliness. Here, the artist uses small paint dabs to make Helena's frizzy hair, to embroider gold brocade, to describe a knot in a ribbon and the highlight on a pearl, in order to create an illusion of close contact (Lawson, 2006, p. 165). Through "relative clarity" created through his distinctive flurried brushwork, Rubens captures a quality of clandestine peaking and attends to capturing the fine nuances of her countenance, to enhance the effect of her provocation for the viewer. Her eyes make intimate contact; there is a side-glance of mischievousness and her pursed lips make a coquettish half-smile. A depiction of such vicissitudes of affect is part of the Baroque fascination with the *earthly* change that makes ugliness: "revolutions of time", which include cycles of existence, of creation and destruction, or the sexual vacillation implied in this painting (Martin, 1955, p. 170).

Figure 23. Rubens. *Het Pelsken, The Little Fur*, 1638 (Lawson, 2006, p. 164)

Then there are the purely theatrical elements of the Baroque style, used to enhance the sexual thrill and to sublimate the uncomfortable ugliness, so that its illuminative potential is missed. There is a sense of Rubens having directed Helena's position – which must have been a lengthy pose for his documentation – or, he must have exaggerated this suggestive stance for his interpretation. Her arms crossing her body sustain the *contrapposto* as it drapes the sloped pelvis with the artist's pelt cape and gossamer-like negligee wound around her hand, as it incipiently falls from her body, rendered through the artist's mastery of translucency, in which he is able to make dark tones visible through paler topcoats. By pulling the hair strands through marks of fiery oranges and mahoganies of the coat into the background to encircle the young woman's body, and by implanting her on a scarlet rug with a plush cushioned-stool (pushed onto the floor, in a heated moment), Rubens extends the sumptuous textures into the painting as a whole, permeating it within intimated sensations of skin and sheets. The blushing-red of the carpet and the flush purple browns of the coat line the painting as a whole.

Rubens further intensifies this warmth through Baroque backlighting, which simultaneously invests the sanctified sexuality of this woman – in all her honest ugliness – with devout energy. Helena's physical form is laminated with the amatory surface glow so that the viewer is protected from real confrontation: her "shape and texture are conveyed enough through the interplay of tones; the whole surface shimmers with points of light" (Wedgewood, 1982, p. 142). What is more, the use of *chiaroscuro* or "Hollywood lighting" (Hockney & Gayford, 2016, p. 172) – an "exaggerated contrast of light and shadow" – matches the intensity of mystical feeling, whether extreme states of pleasure or pain: the "dramatic, violent, tormented" (Conti, 1979, p. 42). In this moment, with her illuminated curls, Helena becomes a kind of angelic vehicle by which one can be absorbed into God via the connection through the permeable female body. Rubens suspends Helena in a non-gravitational space: the wave-like line and the vanishing of the "limitations of the perpendicular" by which Helena 'flies' with a freedom of psychological and spiritual expansion, achieving a merging with God (Fleming, 1946, p.125). As Fleming (1946) writes of this style, "the active lines in its painting … all exist at the expense of serenity … and complete plastic unity. They are always elements of the fantastic, the illogical, the imaginative" (p. 128). Other illusionistic devices to create a theatrical "suspension of disbelief" enhance the here-and-nowness of the overwhelming, thrilling entrancement. Schama (2009) explains that instead of perceiving

the distinct planar foreground, middle-ground distance as in Renaissance painting, Baroque paintings break the frame between picture and viewer, thereby cultivating a stage-spectator view. From here one can *feel* the drama of the enticement of the scene right before one's eyes: "it created a space in which the subject and the spectator may be joined in a specific and sometimes dramatic moment in time" (Osbourne, 1986, pp. 108-109). The effect is partially due to the *alla prima* painting in which the artist works directly from the model and precisely paints what he sees onto the canvas without preparatory sketches.[154]

Witkin not only protests against the portrayal of the fallible humans as the "revelatory body" (Elkins, 2004, p. 103), but also rebels against the Protestant Baroque's use of the ugly material items as a meditative object through which *anima* (Godly breath or spirit) is revealed. Witkin's changes show us that this form of engagement with ugliness is superficial and evasive. For, in this subgenre of realism, called *vanitas* painting, depictions of ugly objects marked by the forces of life, decay or death, are suffused with qualities that encourage a quiet contemplation of items that are marked by the signs of the transience of mortal life (Brion, 1967). The inclusion of everyday domestic objects of this world is, as in the Catholic Baroque, inspired by a desire to appeal to an increasingly democratised art market emerging through the power of trade and the consequent rise of the merchant class in Flanders. However, in contrast to Theatrical Realism's portrayal of the Catholic idea of emotional expansion as a means to envelope Godly infinitude, this "Mindful *Vanitas*" mystical style is inspired by Protestant Calvinistic ideas of manifesting Godly grace. Such "grace" emerges immanently through mindful penetration of these concrete objects through hands-on physical contact, inspired by principles of hard work, pragmaticism and modesty.[155] Ardnt (1979) asserts: "It is not enough to know God's word; one must also practice it in a living, active manner (p. 40)."[156] She describes rituals that enable a "marital-union" with the Almighty, through the sharpening of sensitivity to perception of the self and surroundings. She implies the practice

[154] The advent of oil painting enabled the wet-on-wet or *alla prima* (Italian meaning 'first attempt') direct method of painting in which layers of wet paint form the image. Hockney and Gayford (2016) describe the immediacy and spontaneity of this process in which the vitality of the subject is directly infused by the artist into the work through the artist's keen perceptive skills and technical prowess.

[155] In Catholicism, intense suffering and martyrdom is expressed in practices such as ceremonial sacrament and confession. In Protestantism, God is loving and "merciful" and offers a share in the divine and adherence to specific principles ensures salvation (Joseph, 1990, p. 493).

[156] The Protestant or Calvinistic work ethic is a concept that emphasises that hard work, discipline, modesty and frugality indicate a person's subscription to values espoused by that faith.

of a way of finding God in meditation on what is ugly subject matter, because of an idea that "[t]he full intensity of the moment … an object, like the body, like nature herself, has a *spirit* which is augmented, rather than diminished, or destroyed by time" (p. 262, italics added). Animism is at play here: Godly spirit is to be found within the innermost essence of physical objects of this world. Brion (1968) writes (of Vermeer):

> the act of pouring milk into a jug, reading a letter, fingering a necklace, looking at the sky or a flower, or listening to footfalls in the street became a symbol of the intensely lived moments, as if the finite had attained all possibilities of the infinite (p. 262).

This idea resounds in the mystic Frank, who writes God's "word" is hidden within us, as well as in the stuff of the world and is revealed to us through tender engagement with his creation.[157] Mystical moral epiphanies are said to emerge from this cultivation of attention to the mortality of the ugly objects: messages from God about the transience of pleasure and the preciousness of life in fleeting time (*momento mori*), acquisitiveness and vanity. [158] According to the National Gallery of Art (2007), these paintings aimed to fend off acquisitiveness for an increasingly wealthy Dutch trading society. It would warn them of the futility of their materialism and secularisation as a result of their geographic and intellectual exploration (p. 29). [159] Petit (1988) explains that the message of the *vanitas* was more pertinent than that of a mere still life, and it thus became an significant sub-genre: "[A]ny still lives which deal with the contemplative life, practical life and the life of pleasure … the passage of time and the passage of life … and the hereafter and the resurrection… fall under the category *vanitas*" (p. 17).

[157] This is a form of Gellman's (2017) "super sensory" experiencing: seeing God within one's apprehension of the physical object.

[158] In their account of the Protestant Baroque, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, notes: "There was the influx of exotic products like porcelains, silks and spices from India, Sri Lanka, Japan … the Dutch East India Company. This was accompanied by an intellectual exploration that led to an increasing secularisation of society. Descartes, an émigré from France, for example, found a fertile environment in the Netherlands for ideas that recast the relationship between philosophy and theology, and opened the door to science. Publishing of materials such as maps, atlases and musical scores flourished (p. 29)." There were important discoveries in astronomy, optics, botany, biology and physics. These affected the style – the kinds of everyday objects – depicted in these still lives.

[159] Mander (2007) insists that the artist himself subscribes to an etiquette of discipline and restraint. "Do not waste time. Do not get drunk or fight. Do not draw attention by living an immoral life. … Painters belong in the environment of princes and learned people. They must be polite to their fellow artists. Listen to criticism even that of the common people. … Thank God for your talent and do not be conceited. … Finally, eat breakfast early in the morning and avoid melancholia" (p. 41).

Although Witkin does not directly reference van Steenwyck's *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (van Steenwyck, 1646) (Fig. 24), he refers to this genre in his *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990) (Fig. 26) by giving us a *vanitas*-inspired mix of amputated hands and arms; ripe and decaying grapes; pomegranates and fresh seafood as a table spread. Through the sub-realistic conventions of the genre of realism, he includes objects of the ugly aesthetic in the scenes, such that the display of objects is marked by forces that make them less typologically ideal. Van Steenwyck paints the everyday domestic kitchen table-top with an arrangement of kitchen paraphernalia and foodstuffs. Juxtaposed with brass, ceramic and basketry vessels are fruit, fish and fowl. The ugly aesthetic is embedded in the limp birds and lifeless aquatic creatures as well as the imperfect grapes and blemished peaches. These organic objects represent the visitation by the extrinsic spirit of life-death, and, alongside the immutable plates and bowls on a solid surface, are accentuated as changeable organic matter.[160]

Figure 24. van Steenwyck, *Still Life of Game, Fish and Kitchen Utensils,* 1646, (ArtUK, n.d.)

The artist employs realistic Flemish oil painting techniques to capture the perceptual markers of ugliness. There is indeed a description of the physical lifecycles of the objects: the slender divisions between life, death and resurrection that make each object less of a thing they need to be in order

[160] Like a typical still life of this period, these objects overlap as if naturally left behind, an array of things that would normally be found together – perhaps in a particular room in a house, which contributes truthful depiction of everyday reality, here, in the kitchen. *Vanitas* paintings are grouped according to a system of classification informed by ways of designing rooms or scenes of daily life in a household. "Kitchen, banquet, peasant, interior, and fish scenes; floral, smoking, flora and fauna, pronk and illusionistic still lives, the game piece and the Vanita." (Petit, 1988, p.17).

to be a kind of thing or thing at all. Healthiness, freshness, vigour, sickness and decay are imparted through mimesis of textual qualities of iridescence, translucency, wetness, pallidness or dryness. This "glorification with substance" is achieved through monochrome underpainting and multiple layers of glazing varnish, which fashion "pearl-like" or "rough, coarse" pigments to convey the "regularity of time" (Brion, 1967, p. 262). Coarse russet marks on different-sized peaches indicate rotting; shiny spots on a bunch of grapes connected to stalky tendrils make them feel recently picked. Indented dark dots of the urn's oxidised metal contrast to the raised follicle marks of the half-plucked pheasant skin. The tension between the alive-dying-dead of the real ugly object is accentuated through the contrast between flopping, wilting, drooping of the vulnerable fleshy and stiffness of the durable abiotic kitchenware – the earthenware, stoneware and brass – on the sturdy, wooden apron-table. The anaemic pheasant and the five small feathered birds fall curvilinearly and are arranged so as to hang off the side of the table in atrophy pre-*rigor mortis* (a postmortem rigidity). The torpedo forms of the water-glimmered fish, which propel their movement, are reduced to limpid, overlapping arched flaps on a platter. These close placements of the objects suggest an intermingling and cross-contamination of life and death.

Indeed, some of these objects are placed by van Steenwyck in the scene because they are conventional iconographic *vanitas* symbols for mystical truths. Putrefaction stands for the ultimate Godly truth of the "state of affairs" of the mystical experience: that "beauty ends at the skin"; exotic and domestic objects point to the futility of acquisitiveness, while the grapes represent the Eucharist (Petit, 1988, p. 18). However, van Steenwyk also inserts qualities to induce a hypnotic calmness that *leads* to such insights, a kind of sedation amidst the horror of the ugliness. These mystical mindful stylistic elements in the realm of the painting, in keeping with the mystical ideology and philosophy of Protestantism, encourages delicate communion with these ugly objects of *vanitas* and, by consequence, introspection of the self. Here, the standard Dutch still life scale of the painting, which is only 36cmx46cm, facilitates a delving into the items: it does not overwhelm the viewer but inspires "*contemplative* vision of the depts of reality" (Brion, 1967 p. 225, italics added). The creation of shallow space – by placing the objects against a flat, neutral wall-seeming surface – and the mottled whites and beiges, to fit in with the array of objects in their variation of yellow hues, pulls the viewer's eye into a direct gaze. With observation hooked into the objects themselves, van Steenwyck encourages a visual caressing and infiltration of the surface

volumes through the interplay between hollowed and filled-out circular curvatures. In this pyramidal composition, the top of the empty metal pole forms the pinnacle of the triangle, such that the viewer's eye journeys from coiled 'well' through to the recurring convex convolutions; skipping over ugliness.

A further gentle meeting with the ugly object is incited through the way in which the birds are made to hang over the table, which creates a feeling that they may fall into another (our personal) space. Barolsky (2007) writes: "We delight in the skill of the artist's composition, the weaving of disparate objects into a whole, the ordering of things, we enjoy the *tromp l'oeil* of the dead bird that spills over the stone seemingly into our space" (p. 37). There is movement in this *still* life, which cultivates a protective experience of looking, and lends to the *vanitas* message of the "pregnancy of each instant [that] creates voluptuous intimate immobility, which is, at the same time, action" (Brion, 1967, p. 252). This mode of attentiveness with the object itself is enhanced in the use of fine, controlled brush marks and muted colours, often created from natural pigments (that had to be used modestly by the artist who has personally ground them). They lend to an engagement that is "[e]xpectant, meditative, contemplative, listening to exterior sounds and an interior voice" (Brion, 1967, p. 262).

Witkin's Substitution of a "Feeling Language" of Ugliness

The detailed analysis of the paintings of these two styles provides evidence that Baroque paintings present ugliness as only an access point or springboard for other feeling states in which God can be found. We can see that the formal qualities that capture Catholic theatricality or Protestant 'mindful serenity' are painted into or 'over' representations of ugly objects. With this point established, it becomes apparent that Witkin replaces these expressive features with ones that symbolise or embody the network of feelings in encounter with the ugly pre-symbolic object. This gesture of stylistic replacement suggests that he opposes other styles by precluding the "felt" dimension of ugliness in their versions of the Godly encounter. They provide evidence that this spiritual visionary wants to instead draw his spectator into previously avoided fullness of feeling of the ugly objects depicted – an *Einfühlung* – and to hereby redirect them to this ugliness as that very reservoir of Godly reality.

Here, in his capturing of mystical ugly feelings, Witkin is not only a visionary of transcendent realities, but a conduit of divine presence for the spectator. Following the philosophical accounts of artistic expression outlined by Gracyk (2012), the artist externalises ugly feelings in visible qualities of the artwork (as a 'receptacle').[161] His methods of art-making are all appropriately "geomorphological" so as to be immersed in his own mystical pre-symbolic feelings, and enable what Maclagan (2005) calls "sensorial leakage" of them in the language of the artwork (p. 40).[162] [163] We can include these occult ugly processes (sometimes ugly artworks of various mediums in their own right) in the analysis below. They are executed in spiritual-psychic non-places: his cloistered studio embodies his mental underground, and he scouts for otherwise concealed props and subjects to create an installation; a suitable *mise en scène* in which he can enact a further psychologically and energetically cathartic 'happening' or performance. Witkin enters his *dark*room in order to 'bring to light' enigmatic forms through the act of developing the photograph in printing, and to further unleash primordial marks from a similarly murky place in his psyche through drawing and etching – sometimes in techniques of photogravure as in *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990).

[161] This means experiencing the feelings himself such that he may put these in the artwork, hopefully so that the art object further mirrors these sensations back to him and transmits on to his audience (pp. 26-29). The definition of expression here is a compilation of Tolstoy and Collingwood's theories of expression, which are often placed in opposition to one another. According to Gracyk (2012), for Tolstoy (1996): "Art is the activity of intentionally selecting combinations of movements, lines, colours, sounds and other materials in order to transmit to others the same felt emotion that one has personally experienced. An artwork is an intentional combination of movements, lines, colours or sounds and other materials in order to transmit to others the same felt emotion that one has personally experienced" (Tolstoy, 1996 as cited in Gracyk, 2012, p. 26). Gracyk provides several objections to the suggestion that the artist himself has to personally experience the feeling in order to express it in the artwork. He provides Collingwood's (1938) theory as an alternative: "Art is the imaginative activity of shaping material until it expressed emotion, which consists in the artist's bringing a feeling into consciousness as a definite emotion. An artwork proper is an imaginative creation that expresses emotion by bringing it into the consciousness of its creator. More generally, an artwork is any material externalisation that permits an audience to experience that same imaginative combination and to likewise express the same emotion (p. 29)."

[162] It must be reinforced that these are not emotions, but 'feelings' in a vague sense, some of which bear cognitive content.

[163] In contrast to Collingwood (1938), the thesis argues that the artwork needs to not actually "inject" the feelings of ugliness into the spectator in order to be expressive. Rather, we need to be able to see how they could induce such feelings. Such evidence is provided in this thesis through an analysis of the way in which Witkin's style can symbolise or embody the feelings of the pre-symbolic.

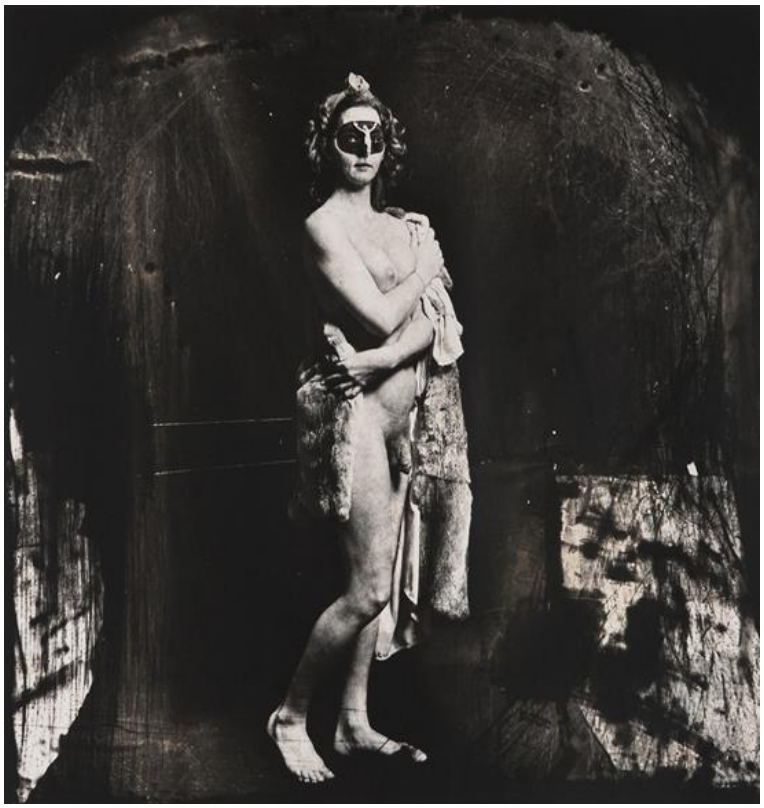

Figure 25. Witkin, *The Journey of a Mask: Helena Fourment*, 1985 (Coke, 1985, p. 38)

Figure 26. Witkin, *Feast of Fools*, 1990 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment (Witkin, 1984) and *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990) (Fig. 25 & 26) are both artworks that are made in Witkin's secluded photographic warehouse in New Mexico described by Cravens (1993): the hermetic physical space that acts as an embodiment of this pre-symbolic. It is an apt atelier in which he locates *object trouvé* (found objects) and appropriate subjects of extreme ugliness, that thereby that provoke his geomorphological 'shamanistic entrancement', before he photographs. In this 'Abrahamic test', he scours the everyday environment and even ventures into the New Mexico mortuaries where he seeks to obtain unclaimed bodies to surface these humans into public sight.[164] A first act of rebellion against these mystical invocations involves stripping the artwork of the Baroque feelings that occlude and repress the perceptual signs of ugliness. In a geomorphological gesture, he draws out the ugly meaning from perceptual qualities of the objects that appear in the Baroque versions, but which are subdued or hidden by their expressive formal qualities. He thereby undoes the occluding painterly spiritual subterfuge.

In *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment* (Witkin, 1984), for example, Witkin heightens the play on ugly aesthetic human-animal form, from which Rubens' salaciousness detracts. The photographer does so by laying bare the painting's bestial, predatory sexuality, that is tempered by the cultivated velvetiness to express a kind of 'regal' or dignified spiritual eroticism. Here, the maltreated, intersex person in a cellar-cage replaces the voluptuous woman in a plush, aristocratic bedroom; a shrunken animal skin takes the place of a luxurious coat. The mottled effect of this flimsy piece of hide (with a loose seam that falls behind the subject's back and shoulder) echo discoloured skin, legs and exposed genitalia. Together with the rough, bushy or thorny tactile qualities created by the scratches on the negative, and the mottled shadows of night-time prowl given through effects of graffiti and spraypaint, it alludes to the African savannah and the aggressive rough-and-tumble quality of a manly-beastly territory. Likewise, in his *Feast of Fools* (Witkin, 1990), Witkin confronts the viewer with a spectrum of degrees of aliveness kept at bay

[164] In the documentary *Vile Bodies* (1997) Witkin negotiates with a legless vagrant on the street and recruits a woman with malformed legs at an exhibition opening. Parry (1998) describes Witkin's practice of riding the New York subway in order to scout for bearded women and thalidomide victims, and how he "worked for years as a maitre d'hotel in Albuquerque, in the heart of the multitude" (Parry, p. 180). Witkin was expelled from the University of New Mexico for inappropriately borrowing the dissected heads that he used in *The Kiss* (1982). The artist had to deal with legal and ethical issues as a kind of sacrificial "Abrahamic" test. He also worked with his assistant Beth Love to find "change objects" *(le hazard objectif)* that are an "intimation of almost mystical intimation in the universe to which the surrealist must be open" (Malt, 2014, p. 204).

by Steenwyck through meticulous Protestant Baroque filling-in. He uses the recurring surface of bloody porous tissue of the wound as a kind of visceral point of entry into the real, ugly experience of cross-contamination between kinds of things in decay in *vanitas*. Amputated feet and a hand, molluscs and fruit are bound by this texture in a decaying webbed heap, where things touched with a force of death lose their identity, spawning other micro-organismic life: a "cycle of eternal recurrence" of reincarnation (Miller, 1997, p. 40).

The perceptual markers of ugly are enhanced by the other qualities that suffuse the remakes with the pre-symbolic feelings of the ugly aesthetic. This excludes representations that examine the iconography of the 'phallic' mother in Witkin's oeuvre.[165] Indeed, obstetric references abound in Witkin's work, but this attention to mere subject matter does not honour the "mother" as a metaphor for the monistic reality against which one struggles in the *experience* of the formation of objects of one's identity (Grosz, 1989), and objects at large.[166] This union with this symbolic 'mother', is, for Witkin, a picture of ultimate reality, and the fullness of this experience must be embodied in his work – leaked from the ugly objects into the qualities of the artwork at large – in order to be catalysing and revelatory. Such an experience is far more complex than the mere expression of differing emotional 'volumes' as in the Baroque. Following the pre-symbolic, this haptic lining of higher consciousness involves both avoidance and attraction to higher reality: both painful fears of annihilation, ego-death or engulfment, bodily disintegration, haptic closeness and evisceration, as well as pleasurable familiarity, and fascination of the unknowable object and satiation.[167]

Parry (1998) describes Witkin as a *terribiltà* (p. 185), a term used to refer to the sublime terror of Michelangelo's religious work. Indeed, these photographs arouse ugliness' primitive dread and anxiety that ripples through all three pre-symbolic accounts; this for Witkin is an appropriate God-fearing to that which is omnipotent and all-encompassing. Unlike the cathexis Catholic states of

[165] Metaxatos' (2004) analysis is an example of many instances in which psychoanalytic interpretations bear what Maclagan (2005) calls an "iconographic prejudice" (p. 10). The artistic representation of pre-symbolic "mother" is hypostatised as a presence of the woman who looks like Kristeva's "monstrous" or "phallic" mother, as Witkin uses the masked pregnant female in works such as *Wife of Cain* (1981).
[166] The maternal is the "ambivalent principle", which "stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnamable that one imagines as femininity, nonlanguage or body" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 162).
[167] An evocation of these dimensions in a feeling-style involves avoidance of an ontological merging of objects in Klein, and the self-with mother in Lacan and Kristeva, or those of attraction to it.

sex or torture, Witkin feels God in an inexorable primal fear as a base state bestowed by a Creator. He expresses a yearning "… to create a link between the person posing in the picture and the mind of the viewer that always associates it with danger, and the condition of danger, of being afraid" (Witkin, 1997, pp. 37-38). In both *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment* and *Feast of Fools*, we find the formation of landscapes of natural danger zones stamped as ghost-structures on the compositions of the work, hereby harking back to primal and instinctual fight-or-flight responses. As the emotional theorist Walton (2004) writes, "to our very early ancestor, the world was an intimidating haunted place in which violent storms, the threat of fire, unfathomable disease and suffering all had an awesome power over him" and so he invented the gods (p. 2).

Witkin crafts this response to the all-powerful through the watermarking of perilous mountainous pyramidal formations of the *homo sapien* natural world. These rising landforms grid and dominate the composition with a grandiosity of cosmic creation, a "crowning of pyramids in a gesture of benediction" (Parry, 1998, p. 176). Transgendered Helena is placed centrally in this parody of Ruben's version, such that an implied triangular directionally is created from the bottom corners of this square format to head 'peak', the play on treacherous precipice. In *Feast of Fools,* a once gentle curvilinear composition is made into decaying formations of rocky ridges, ledges and saddles in its craggy juttings. The configuration of Witkin's array of objects in this still life peaks at the index finger of the amputated hand and descends through the hazardous sliding line of a fibula to a narrow cool of this pile of amputated human limbs, fruit and seafood tentacles. The fibers of disembodied tissues of the feet and arms in this heap avalanche down. Drip-glue fingers become glaciers in cavernous negative spaces, in which distress is induced through allusions to hyperthermia. The 'tablecloth' that ripples beneath the 'stew' at the bottom of the artwork evokes dangers of vicious seas of the diluvial in water with marks of spraying-spits. Nearby reticulations make wave-crests of the biblical Flood or the plasmic volcanic flames of the Sinai burning bush. In place of van Steenwyck's steady urn in the top-right, a clench-fingered hand appears, to be grabbing for help or pleading for mercy above, during drowning, sinking and falling. The forms and textures of this stacked smorgasbord hereby evoke a landscape of the Romantic sublime painted by Schopenhauer: "a large scale to the battle of the trading elements, in the storm of tempestuous oceans where the mountainous waves rise and fall, dash themselves furiously against steep cliffs and toss their spray high into the air, the storm howls, the sea boils, the lightning flashes

from the black clouds, and the peals of thunder drown the voice of storm and sea" (Schopenhauer, 1976, p. 464).

There are more evocations of primordial spiritual fear of the pre-symbolic in Witkin's *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment*. There is a build-up of long, uncontrolled marks that scathe Ruben's sensual or van Steenwyck's tempered oil paint. He achieves this in his gestures of 'psychic automatism', through which he lets loose his unconscious handwriting of amorphous forms – the Sadean nirvana of escape from the ego that is achieved through purgation (Badger, 1999). For the artist, the "mark is the primal gesture, the internal connection between the caveman and the cosmos" (Coke, 1985 p. 7). With his special "box of tools" (razor blades, pins, needles and chemicals) for abrades, scratches, scores and stains the negative (or copper photogravure plate) of the photographic print before developing it onto paper (Parry, 1998, p. 180).[168] Witkin's 'calligraphy' made with the quickness of desperation, evokes attempts at scratching as an escape from a cell of life-threatening punishment: "There is for me in this situation a strange, terrible sense of being forced to view the events in rooms of asylums or places of torture" (Manatakis, para. 9). They have the psychiatric quality of the swollen lashes of self-harm or whipping, alarming incisions or desperate gouging. Both the once-slithering Helena *tableau* and the locomotive residues of the still life (e.g. the undulating octopus tentacles), are frozen in portending terror in the photographic still-frame.

There are very particular fears in the pre-symbolic in which Witkin finds God. How does the artist conjure these? For Klein, the pre-symbolic infant deeply fears death from annihilatory forces that are actually projections of its own internal "death drive"; if fears that the object against which it rents rage, will retaliate. "[T]he child bears a paranoia that all the pain comes from the outside and will attack and destroy him (Rycroft, 1995, p. 31)".[169] Death is so inextricable with ugliness; that is also a perceptual marker of an ugly object.[170] The artist describes his photographs as a kind of "parting" or final image: "I want … my photographs to be as powerful as the last thing a person

[168] Photogravure is a process whereby a photographic negative is transferred to a metal plate and is then etched as intaglio printmaking copper plate printed onto etching paper.
[169] As Klein describes in her *Development of the Child* (1921): "The destructive impulse projected outwards is first experienced as oral aggression. I believe that oral-sadistic impulses towards the mother's breast are active from the beginning of life, though with teething the cannibalistic impulse increases in strength" (Klein, 2017a, p. 5)
[170] Walton confirms that this fear is our prime and primordial; that we "…tread warily in the presence of death".

sees or remembers before *death*" (Witkin, 1995, p. 13, italics added), as if they are invested with the finality of extermination by God as Final Judge. In contrast to the facile display of skin rotting in the Baroque still lives, Witkin plummets us into the unthinkable terror of disappearance and nothingness, of non-existence determined by the higher powers, via the sensations of extra-terrestrial vastness and emptiness of floating in outer space. This spiritual infinitude at physical 'ending' is given in the astrological *talcum nebula* created in the *photogravure* process, that are made to float on the bottom left-right of the still life photographic plate as eschatological debris. The abstract mark is elemental; as if units of Creation and remnants of Destruction: simultaneously evoking geomorphological soil granule speckles, solar flares or sprinkled stars of the Milky Way. They speak of the Godly breath as enlivening Adam as first man; pure air as the leftover of death; vaporous spirit, a last death inhalation. We find this air in Pope's (2012) poem about Witkin's rendering of human parts as objects in his still lives in which there is extraction of the respiration of the living:

> I could tell that it was human,
> past tense. And was
> it the transformation
> that cut off my breath?
> The sudden shift from
> appendage to ornament?
> Or was it the knowledge
>
> that this is something death
> could be no chorus, no reunion
> of voices, but simply, through the act
> of dissolution, *becoming something,*
> *to suck away*
> *the sacred breath* (Pope, n.d. as cited in Chavez, 2012, para. 8-9, italics added). [171]

[171] Pope's poem is a reflection on Witkin's work entitled *Still Life with Mirror* (1998), which contains an amputated foot with five embedded steel nails, beside a bunch of asparagus in front of a silvered piece of glass (Pope n.d. as cited in Chavez, 2012, para. 7). However, the same occurrence of the mixing of inanimate and living can be applied to this still life.

An *élan vital* of the sparked marks that make tiny dynamic galactic explosions, or kinetic sprouting seeds, is terminated in the still frame of the photograph. Death is evoked in the hollowed-out spaceship capsule shape of the vignette inside the square format of both photographs, organic pentagonal or oval outlines that hermetically seal the subject matter into a kind of airless vacuum, making the generating and sustaining of life impossible here.

In the work of Lacan and Kristeva, it is not the termination of our life itself that we dread in our primaeval forms of experiencing, but the dissolution of the fantasy of self as separate – the "ego identity". According to Lacan, this separate imago of unity, cohesion and fixity given through narcissistic identification of the various forms of "mirrors", is the means by which we develop the fantasy of coherent, stable and whole self in the Imaginary Order, which is held in language through the word "I" in the Symbolic Order. However, ugliness shatters this fantasy of the "mental permanence of the I" (Lacan, 2001, p. 3 – in its exposure of the illusion of typological perception and conceptualization – by drawing us closer to the inexpressibility of material reality; to the truth that all that exists is an unnamable and unbounded fragmented set of phenomenological sensations of the *hommelette's* Real, that is also evoked by the ugly object. Alienation looms when we realise this Lacanian *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) of having "constituted ourselves through identification with the external counterpart" (Hook, 2002, p. 169). Indeed, the realism of the Baroque is an extension of this illusion; a replication of the world as we see it. In contrast, Witkin triggers the ontological dissolution of the self by cultivating an anonymous exchange between the seer and represented seen, hereby evoking Lacan's idea of the "gaze" of the m/other as a form of mirroring our coherent "I" (Hook, 2002, p. 158). Witkin's photograph of Helena is called *Journey of the Mask* "evoking the mystery of the Godly face", for Witkin claims to create the "egoless" being (Manatakis, 2019, para. 8) in which spirit substitutes constructed substance. Perhaps this acquaintance with the boundlessness of God-given soul through depersonalisation is what Coke (1985) is referring to when he writes: "To understand or sense what Joel-Peter Witkin is doing, it is best to put on a *mask*, as one might do during the carnival season, and go amongst the strange players in his surreal world" (p. 7, italics added). Witkin describes his mystical quest as one in which he attempts to "seek the face before [he] was made" (Witkin, 1998, p. 22). Acts of 'looking away' are distinctive in the subjects of these works: "Real art, real art … takes you out of *yourself*" (Beem, 2008, p.2, italics added). Helena wears one of the photographers ubiquitously utilised

toreador masks onto which he glues a crucifix and the freshly stitched, swollen, post-mortem infant is blindfolded, which points to abortion or abandonment.[172] Through the posing and ugly leitmotif of masking (sometimes with balaclavas, scarves or large hats), he creates *objet de curiosité*, which provoke effects of defamiliarisation of 'self' and 'other': they obstruct the seer's sense of being seen and are thus known as the mysterious "object [that] stares back" (Elkins, 1997).[173]

In the course of his work, Witkin stages these photographs in which he blindfolds, belts and hoods his subjects as a kind of strangulation of the limited physical body to exorcise a formless (ugly) spirit (Metaxatos, 2004, p. 15). "Eric" and "Carl", who were subjects in his photographs, explain that Witkin "does not go out of [his] way to make you feel comfortable" (as cited in Cravens, 1993, p. 57). According to Witkin, interaction with subjects and subject matter in his work are a kind of "play therapy", through which he uncovers his own unbound and unknowable spirit to transpose in the photograph. He writes that "[e]veryone that I photograph, alive or dead, is really myself: I see myself in them. They represent the mysteries and majesties that I have to fulfil, not by way of any kind of physical union, but through a psychic one, by way of images" (Witkin, 1985, p. 37). He (1985) describes these "intense mediations on psychological impulses and ritualistic instincts, which stimulate extreme forms of behaviour" (as cited in Cravens, 1993, p. 40), which enable a lifting of the mask of his subjects and of himself.[174] In an interview in 1985, he notes:

> The only photographer whose work strongly influenced me was August Sander … he was able to go behind the mask of each [subject] with the most straightforward use of the medium. To me, people were only masks. My interests would not be to reveal what the individual subject chose to hide, but instead, to make qualities of the hidden more meaningful (Witkin as cited in Coke, 1985, p. 36)

[172] We see this same toreador mask in, for example, *Journeys of the Mask: The History of Commercial Photography in Juarez, New York City* (1984) and *Self Portrait* (1984). He also masks the subjects of *Siamese Twins, Los Angeles* (1998) and *Melvin Buckhart: Human Oddity, Florida* (1985), and uses a blindfold in *Woman and Dog, New Mexico* (1976).

[173] Millett (2008) writes that through the techniques of "theatrical spectacle", in which the body is "spotlighted, placed on pedestals, and framed in excessive stage sets", the viewer is encouraged to engage in the "voyeuristic access" to questionable "diagnostic" (knowable) objects (p. 8) – "all photography may be said to solicit a stare" (p. 10). *The Object Stares Back* (1997) is the title of the renowned art critic Elkins' book in which he examines how looking is distorted by vision and often informed by unconscious agendas.

[174] As noted by several critics, his sadism and masochism are seen as attempts to unleash the unconscious forces and to access parts and primordial sensations (see Metaxatos, 2004, pp. 11; 72-72).

Decomposition calls on the monistic scriptural image of "dust onto dust". In the *Feast of Fools* still life, Witkin heightens the sense of the melding of all things, through his mélange of parts of different cadavers. In upholding ethical integrity, the artist only photographs unclaimed bodies (or *corpus delicti*).[175] In Pope's poem, definite articles replace personal names: "… but I could watch the ragged muscle/ end, the place where the bone emerged/ white-grey, from *the* flaccid base" (para. 6, italics added). There is a lost-and-found quality to the odd objects that he collects with his assistant Beth Love: "I'd go to the flea market and pick up crazy things there for my photographs, like chains and strange *stuff*" (Beem, 2006, p. 2). He excludes his viewer by keeping the names of these rare beings confidential. While some of the titles of the photographs include the names of the subjects, many of them bear pseudonyms of exotic circus acts (e.g. *Melvin Buckhart, Human Oddity, Florida*, 1985), or else, when named after the original painting, the subject literally "becomes" the person who initially posed – this woman is named "Helena".

Fear of this engulfment by the "mother" – Godly reality at large – is the basis for repulsion of the ugly object. For Kristeva, the pre-symbolic represents the child's subsummation with the mother's chôra; a "terror that disassembles" the self (Kristeva, 2008, p. 267). Our separation through abjection is our "earliest [attempt] to release the hold of the maternal entity even before existing outside of her …. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva, 2002, p. 239).The ugly abject object, "takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15). It calls on an emanationism: the idea of all flowing from a single source that conforms with Gellman's (2017) extroverted non-conceptual experiences *of* the perceptual (unity in the world). We know Witkin goes back 'here' because he describes his process as a form of "gestation". Indeed, critics comment on his "sadomasochism" because the paraphernalia of torture in his photographs bear their origins in the milieus of incarceration or medical experimentation, in what Badger (2019) calls the artist's "chambers of horror" (para. 2). There are the signs of being 'locked up' throughout his works, and Helena's room is a prime example of such an invocation of hostage or prisoner. Two white lines converge behind Helena as signs of a bulletproof vault door of gunmetal steel; reinforced concrete surfaces with their punctures emulate gunshot holes. In contrast to the Baroque extension of colour to the end of the

[175] *Corpus delicti* – corpses as a result of criminal acts.

canvas, a cultivated liberty in a 'flight' off the frame, in Witkin's world, subjects are locked within the scene's interior shapes. With no suggestion of doors or openings, he is confined with ugliness – with the all-consuming inexorable omnipresence of God.

Lacan's experience of self-disintegration engendered by the ugly object is instigated through adult experiences of Lacan's *corpse morcele*, the *body* torn in pieces, or "fragmented body" (Lacan, 2001, p. 5). This self-thinglessness threatens the emergence of the time of the dissolution of *all* other things, including the self. To reiterate Evans' (1996) explanation:

> In the mirror stage, the infant sees its reflection in the mirror as a whole/synthesis [a perception which contrasts with] the perception of it its own body… as divided and fragmentary… However, the anticipation of a synthetic ego is henceforth constantly threatened by the memory of this sense of fragmentation, which manifests itself in images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, emasculation, devouring, bursting open of the body, which haunts the human imagination (p. 67).

Witkin evokes this horror presence of mutilated and amputated subject matter in *Feast of Fools*. He further provokes fear of castration through the sight of a nude intersex Helena, which evokes trepidation through identification with the subject matter. More evocative is the employment of his graphic 'wounding' and what can be called a resultant visual language of butchery or lumbering. In practice, Witkin goes to the "hellish pit" (Parry, p. 184) of his darkroom so that he may have "monastic communion with chemicals, darkness and wounds" (Metaxatos, p. 13). Marsh (2003) writes that "the way in which the body is represented in many of these examples is predicated on the idea of revelation and a process of catharsis" (p. 216). Schwenger (2000) describes a kind of "mutilation" of the "skin" of the photograph for what Metaxatos describes as "violence" done to the image – renders *forms* remade and manipulated through chemicals such as bleach, potassium, ferricyanide and selenium (p. 407). Witkin destroys the forms in the photograph itself so destructively that he is "forced to rebuild the image" (Metaxatos, p. 11). He "dodges" and "burns in" to unleash these forms of the world before "things". "I decide how I'm going to – in a primordial way – change the look of the negative to basically mystify it and make it my own. It's kind of like drawing inside the photographic information" (Witkin, 2012, para. 32).

In *Feast of Fools,* serrated edges of feet and arms – and up*rooted* capillaries – provoke the terror of limb-hacking or a wood-chopped cadaver. Voros (2004) poeticises the textures of this exposed anatomy through analogies to woven or laced, hacked woodland parts "… exposed tree roots' very convolutions, withered jewelweed's clumped ganglia and thread filament and fiber/ gobs of rot, radiant viscera made visible/ the stripped branch naked as a bone, ironwood's torqued muscle…" (pp. 82-83). Sensations of primordial disintegration, this "… muck/ where great weight/ fell" are further intensified through the photographer's use of repetition and interlocking of forms in this still life. Exotic molluscs and crustaceans are entangled in amputated, wounded feet and hands and brim with lacey, porous tissue like rotting cheese. This is enhanced by a surrealistic ambiguity of vegetable/animal life parts: "pellet and cluster, berry studded/ … scatterings of teeth" (Voros, 2004, p. 82); the "black bejewelled flesh" (p. 83). The textures of meat pervade Witkin's work, often as "binding agents". The negative spaces of the still life are filled by this gore-cord Parry (1998) notes that Witkin feels an affinity to Kinnell's poem, *The Bear* (1968), in which the hunter pursues a shamanistic quest for identification with the non-human (p. 183). After eating a bear's raw flesh, the protagonist tears the body open – this wound of the ugly object – and falls asleep in the carcass, the "wound" of the object, as in ugliness. Parry explains that Kinnell discovers the "enduring odour of bear". He eats bear "turd sopped in blood" (stanza 3) … and finally discovering the bear's carcass, "hacks a ravine in his thigh", "tears him down his whole length" and climbs into the wound (stanza 4, as cited in Parry, p. 183). All the while he dreams of becoming the bear and being wounded and dying his death, "of lumbering flatfooted/ over the tundra", of being "stabbed twice from within", no matter which way he lurches, whatever "parabola of bear-transcendence" or "dance of solitude" (stanza. 5). When rising to walk, his blood splatters a trail behind him. He awakes bearing the ugly hybridity of feeling half-bear, half-man.

This "evisceration" is connected to the ugly object feeling "close to the body", for it comes from a time in which there was no object and the ugly object was thus once part of us and every single object. Klein concurs that there is only "sensate experience" lived *through the body* (Watts, 2002, p. 94). Witkin creates a sense of (threatening) nearness through the qualities of infectious disease. In *Feast of Fools,* in particular, runny droplets spurt influenza. The scale of these photographs (28x34cm for *Feast of Fools,* 85.1x77cm for *Journey of the Mask; Helena Fourment*) encourage close-up engagement of the spectator, providing visual detail attained through proximity.

The ugly pre-symbolic object characteristically incites both repulsive, painful sensations and attractive, pleasurable ones. These include the intellectual stimulation of the ineffable ugly object, a sense of comfort in both the ugly object's familiarity, and the satiation of needs through connection to the maternal source. There is an eerie sense of former acquaintance that Witkin cultivates through the forging of uncanny ambiguities on all levels of his work – whether in the abstract mark, the hybridisation of form, the effect of remaking. A déjà vu strikes simply because these are remakes of iconic masterpieces. He also implants a sense of the spectator "having owned" or "stored this photographic scene" as a phantom memory, or as a private prophetic vision. The artificial frontal lighting of the objects in these two photographs simulates an experience of the viewer having stumbled across the lost objects of a storeroom cellar or basement with a flashlight in hand. Adams writes of the "eye-level" or vis-à-vis (face-to-face) effect of this work, as if we are "given", or un-consentingly "called unto" the truth of an image made of "congeal[ed] light" (Adams, 2013, "Se Faire Être Une Photographie", para. 15).

It is the indeterminacy and enigma of the pre-symbolic ugly object that generates cognitive exploration and intellectual excitement from the vantage of the adult spectator. As the architectural theorist Bayley (2013) writes, although beauty may be conflated with the good, ugly may be associated with the interesting (p. 35).[176] Witkin achieves this through an exaggeration of amorphous formlessness through tonal contrasts. There is a dearth of information cultivated by his excessive use of shadows in the background in which there is an exaggerated contrast between the detail in the light foreground and background imbued by depth of field. He manufactures such effects through rubbing the negative and using filter techniques in printing, in which he encounters a revelation of primordial darkness *as* enlightenment. He shows these depictions of amorphousness of spirit to others in the photographic product "through the integration of dark and unction – the process of 'photographicus', which makes the breadth of latent light visible, and of my spirit, the dark poem of myself" (Witkin, 1998, p. 15).

[176] Bayley (2013) mentions this insight in a discussion of the Post Modernist's "apotheosizing" of interesting architecture (pp. 235-239).

The image itself stops the spectator in his 'intellectual tracks'. He is left wondering what visual information Witkin holds back in his "cultivated darkness". The pleasurable dimensions of this union with the mother in the pre-symbolic are simultaneously at play through visual allusion of these to exemplary works. Of course, Lacan's sense of plenitude of the infant – the absence of "need" because of the automatic satiation by virtue of a connection to the mother's body, described by Felluga (2015) – is apparent in the sense that this still life is rotting as a thrown-away excess. This sense of this Godly "fountain of provision", is furthered by the idea that the subjects and objects that he uses to make up these images are things unwanted, and therefore unneeded, in a world of surplus. The artist heightens such sensations through repetition of signs of oozing or leaking in his photographs. In his *Feast of Fools*, the fluids of the living flesh spill outside the boundaries of the body, in a mix of blood, puss, fruity drink, the slime of sea creatures, and fall underneath in the sea of the liquid table upon which these juicy things dissolve. While at once claustrophobic cages, these cavernous depressions may, at a second glance, act as hollowed-out cocoons of the divine sanctuary of God as 'shepherd'. Rubens' Helena would have to sleep standing within this thin canvas. In contrast, Witkin's subject can rest in the corners of a sheltering church dome; his still life rests on the think-inked sumptuous blackness of a night-time pillow. Once a bare, Flemish background for kitchen tasks, it now lulls both subject and spectator. While evoking terror, these etched marks ambiguously make a pine-needled nesting; and placenta-like viscosity created by the oil-based printing ink cosset these two scenes in a protected photographic cytoplasm of the gloss finish of the print.

The literary scholar Reed (2017) writes: "Saints are simply those who put themselves on the line … with Witkin we recognize something unspoken, *felt*, dreamed, some condition of being as he'd put it …" (p. 58, italics added). In these two photographs, Witkin invites us into a maelstrom of sensations from conditioned being and seeing. This is a long-lost pre-symbolic past replete with the presence of Godliness, which he retrieved in the very making of these photographs. This personal educing, through performing within a constructed ugly installation, cathartic engagement with subjects, and his own automatist drawings and printing rituals, charges the photographic with a mystical sensation so that it is an artefact and trigger for his 'disciples'. In finalisation, this photographic 'sorcerer' seals this photograph as a 'hallowed *art d' object*'. He "signs" the print with stains of coffee, tea, egg, soy and he prints through "torn, water-misted, crumpled tissue paper

onto precious warm-toned Portinga paper" (Metaxatos, 2004, p. 12); he embalms the print, hand buffing it with encaustic molten beeswax to memorialise it as a relic and preserve it as a talisman (Metaxatos, 2004, p.27). For, through such transfigurations, Witkin has "offer[ed] spectators experiences that simulate [and substitute] those of his religious ancestors" (Reed, 2017, p. 59).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to show how Joel-Peter Witkin's remaking of several iconic paintings from different phases of the Western canon represents a determined effort to foreground the importance of 'ugliness' in the mystical encounter, and to hereby counter the aesthetic rejection of 'the ugly' at large. In order to make this claim, this study examined how the changes that Witkin makes to selected paintings of Renaissance, Catholic and Protestant Baroque, serve to replace these styles' portrayal of Godly contact, with features that instead present ugliness as mystical. In response to the Renaissance paintings of *Leda and the Swan* (da Sesto, 1515-1520) and *The Birth of Venus* (Botticelli, 1485) – where mystical techniques of Platonic Idealism were shown to work to create a vision of transcendence of an otherworld that negates ugliness – Witkin created an ugly world with ugly objects as the locus of God. In his amendments of the Catholic and Protestant Baroque paintings of *Little Fur (*Rubens, 1638) and *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensil*s (van Steenwyck, 1646) – where the thesis revealed that mystical techniques portray mystical feelings that detract from the ugly subject or object – Witkin was shown to insert painterly qualities that made the mystical sensations reside in this ugliness itself.

In order to proceed with such an investigation, Chapter 1 addressed philosophical challenges that may obstruct identifying mysticism and ugliness in artworks. The notion of representing God is fraught with concerns of iconoclasm and anthropomorphism. Thus, this thesis looked to the portrayal of mystical experiences of the Godly, which we defined as a "super- or sub-sensory unitive" experience, in which one or more features of that experience could be seen as a logical response to a property of (the concept of) Godliness. It purported that mystical experiences popular in religious contexts could be seen to be held in the paintings of the corresponding art historical style of that time. With this in mind, the thesis identified the characteristic visual features of the art historical style that worked to convey such an encounter – here, a Renaissance vision or a Baroque feeling of God – as a sub-art-historical style termed a "mystical style".

However, if we were to gauge the role designated to ugliness in such portrayals, and to recognise Witkin's shifted depiction of it to mystically central, we had to find a way to identify ugliness in these works of art. This required overcoming two central, interconnected quandaries: how could

the presence of ugliness be reliably identified with the universal agreement if it is a subjective, relative truth? Even if the word ugliness could be taken to describe an aesthetic experience, how could we objectively verify the phenomenological to make ugliness identifiable and amenable to scholarly interrogation? A primary step was to differentiate between the thin "evaluative" sense of ugliness as a judgement of aesthetic ill-worth (termed the "aesthetically ugly"), from the "thick" substantive sense in which it is used to refer to a variety of aesthetic experience (the "ugly aesthetic"). However, as the philosopher Beardsley (1982) clarifies, one can make an argument for the aesthetic worth (aesthetic beauty) of the quality of the experience of the ugly aesthetic. Indeed, the potential for features of the ugly experience to interface with qualities of witnessing the Almighty – this idea posed visually in Witkin's work – is one circuitous or intermediary argument for its value. The thesis further countered the aesthetic objectivist effort to locate the identity of such an experience as some formula to be found in the physicality of the object, through the insights offered by ontological relativism and particularism. Instead, it honoured the intuitive phenomenological essence of the aesthetic and correspondingly the non-law-like principle of supervenience. This principle included the physicality of the object in the experience within making the aesthetic reducible to it. As such, an aesthetic experience was taken to be a certain quality of perceiving (sensing and conceptualising) an object with an accompanying array of feelings. A description of the perceptive-felt network required that empirical reports of such private experiences be further sourced and collated.

Thus, in Chapter 2, some reflections and theoretical accounts from various literary sources were integrated with theories of the psychoanalytic pre-symbolic. This interconnection was warranted because this thesis demonstrated how descriptions of the infantile mode of perceptual consciousness of the first object of m/other mirrored those of ugliness accurately. It outlined criteria for the identification of the ugly object, the ugly world and ugly feelings in these artworks, as a means to explore the ugly-mystical conversation between the selected paintings and Witkin's remakes. The chapter distilled the perceptual dimension of ugliness into the phenomenon of the mysteriousness of the identity of the object: the ugly object ruptures our sense of knowing it, or of knowing any object at all, as the object is less typologically adherent. This occurrence may manifest in physical and conceptual formless leaking through a containing representative form. The ugly object brings forth the threat of the re-emergence of Klein's "paranoid-schizoid" position

of unlocatable badness; the wordless sensations of self-disintegration of the register of the Real of the infant as *hommelette* or union with abject mother in the semiotic chôra.

Heuristics by which to identify the object in the artwork were said to include conceptual hybridisation, and insufficient or excess physical form or elemental contamination. These withstand ugliness' potential sublimation through the medium of painting. The ontological formlessness presented in the sight of the ugly object thus signals a memory of all objects being perceptually indistinct and conceptually uncategorisable. Hence, we could distil ugliness as a geomorphological occurrence in the experienced object, and the mind doing that experiencing, which means the ugly place must be mental, formlessness, hidden and old. Ugliness' integration with psychoanalytic theory also helps to clarify the sensations of ugliness, and the ugly reality, as those that are typically characteristic of this period: fear of annihilation, ego death, engulfment, alienation, familiarity, evisceration, interestingness, satiation and comfort. We cannot find such features in the artwork's perceptual mimesis of an object. Rather, we find it in the elements of expression of feeling that is cultivated by the formal qualities of the work.

Chapter 3 compared two Renaissance paintings and Witkin's remakes of them. In so doing, it demonstrated how Witkin replaces the Renaissance vision of a supernatural otherworld and quixotic objects, with an ugly geomorphological place and ugly objects, as a means to present ugliness as a portal to a Godly place. In the Renaissance paintings of da Sesto's *Leda* (1515-1520) and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1485), the Christian experience of transcendence into the world of ideal forms through intellectual focus is created by a mystical style called Platonic Idealism. These two paintings give the spectator a glimpse of the look of an abiotic, heavenly otherworld world of ideal objects engineered with the geometrical precision cultivated through the fictionalism of paint, that they may access themselves in intense exercises of cerebral exertion. Supernaturalism is cultivated through the use of perspective to create spacelessness, the manipulation of light to enhance luminosity, and the depiction of unrealistic facts of scenes from Greek mythology. Techniques of idealisation of objects – "de-uglification" – is achieved through the use of geometry to fashion impossible mathematically-perfect, immortal, petrified physical forms. This idealisation is enhanced by techniques described by Wölfflin (1932, pp. 14-16), namely, the "linear" presentation of form (in which forms are articulated through outlines and

contouring), “closed form” (in which masses are contained or ‘compacted’), “multiplicity” (the presentation of individual forms that comprise a scene as distinct from the whole), and “absolute clarity” (where “composition, light and colour” serve to exaggerate the definition of each form, irrespective of their appearance to the eye in normal perception) (pp. 14-16). These techniques cancel out the ugly perceptual markers: there are no blemishes on these unrealistic objects, no malformation, no signs of mortality. We are given the message to ignore or avoid the ugly object, for we have to escape from the earthbound panorama of the dishevelled and deficient in order to envision true, or Godly, reality.

It was demonstrated that Witkin’s *Leda* (1986) and *Gods of Earth and Heaven* (1988) invert this strategy in their presentation of phantasms of a mental underworld of the geomorphological, from which experience of the ugly object originates. They contain the concomitant objects that bear the perceptual markers of the ugly aesthetic. In the sourcing of this concealed subject matter, Witkin draws on the genre of oddity photography. He exploits qualities of the medium of the photograph to set up a candid confrontation with that which is otherwise obscured, and to simultaneously amplify an “ugly” uncategorisable nature or ontological mysteriousness. He uses geomorphological style consisting of those that are mental (composition or gaze, bordering, studio light, monochrome, shallow space), formlessness (formless found objects, sharp contrasts, moving images), beneath (textures, organic shapes, perspective/shot) and age (“pastiche” references to early photographic periods such as Symbolism, freak and early portrait photography).

Chapter 4 compared Baroque paintings and Witkin’s remakes, and sought to demonstrate how Witkin replaces mystical feelings that arise in the face of the ugly objects with qualities of ugly feelings themselves, thus advocating for mystical sensations to be located in the depths of the ugly object itself. The Baroque paintings of Rubens’ *Little Fur* (1638) and van Steenwyck’s *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (1646), present the viewer with spiritual scenes *made from* the anointed stuff of the this-worldly through realism. However, these paintings overwhelm the ugly object with a transfixing feeling that is accessed from the ugly object. Thus, the quotidian ugly is made merely instrumental in the activation of other quixotic mystical feelings. In the Catholic Baroque painting of *Little Fur*, we find the dramatic egalitarian idea of the suffusion of the omnipresent Godly in the commonplace and pedestrian through the mystical style of Theatrical

Realism. The ugly object is included the scene through the realistic techniques of Wölfflin such as the "painterly" presentation of form (where objects look "merged" and are apprehended not as "solid, tangible bodies", but a "shifting semblance"), and "open form" (in which elements of an object unit may extrude). A heightened sensation through the expression of the artist's sensual feelings are expressed in the use of colour, mark and textural qualities of the scene, stage-like composition, framing and lighting. We are thereby instructed to find ourselves in his own real ugly body-as-earthly object through the ugliness of the portrayed subject. We are encouraged to feel into the strong vicissitudes of corporeal sensation as if radiating pulsations of awful yet redemptive Godliness that are transmitted in the intensity of affect.

Similarly, a spiritual seeker of Protestant Netherlands is brought to a table-display – to meditate on a terrestrial spread in van Steenwyck's *Still Life of Game, Fish, Fruit and Kitchen Utensils* (1646) through the techniques of the Mindful *Vanitas* mystical style. The artist is entranced into a state of grounded meditation on these ugly objects, by a calm serenity induced by the surface of containment and reticent quality of painterliness, which depict objects with signs of ugliness, and may lead to an awareness of the fragility of life, and connection with the self. However, it protects him from ugliness' experiential depths. The ugliness of the object is captured through the mastery of textures and forms that describe the contrasts between aliveness, and perceptual signs of decay or death. The use of small-scaled canvases and techniques of shallow space, spotlighting, stillness, controlled brush marks and muted colours encourage present attention and immersive union with the physicality of the object. It is through this meditation on the ugly object that the subject may derive divine, moral insight into the truth of his own necessarily terrestrial existence.

In Witkin's *Journey of the Mask, Helena Fourment* (1984) and *Feast of Fools* (1990), the artist substitutes the array of these other mystical-feeling qualities for one that expresses the 'felt-dimension' of the very ugly objects that are given, yet hidden, in these scenes. In this way, he guides the viewer into an encounter with ugliness as the full source of mystical encounter. He reacts against the Baroque treating the perceptual dimension of ugliness as a kind of visual anchor point for other feeling-states prescribed as mystical. Witkin embodies this mystical psychic descendance in his own entranced state self-activated through appropriately "geomorphological" or rituals of performance art. He uses installation, and psycho-automatist drawing and printing to

assist in the streaming of his incited ugly feelings into the artwork – into a mode of visual expression that can, in turn, transmit it to the viewer. The chapter evidenced the rebellion against non-ugly Baroque feeling-states by reading elements of Witkin's formal language in his remakes as evocations of the distinctive emotional features described in the dimensions of the pre-symbolic "felt". Fear is emitted and aroused through suggestive watermarks of perilous natural settings; the terror of nothingness in death through suggestions of infinitely empty outer-space; the threat to sense of self through a cultivation of anonymity of subjects and objects through a masked gaze; the horror of bodily mutilation of the non-object of physical self, through textures of meat and graphic cuts and engulfment through marks of incarceration. Familiarity is cultivated through illusions of uncanniness and the pleasure of intellectual irreducibility through obfuscation of shadow and depth of field. Furthermore, the plentitude of the maternal source is suggested through the patina of spillage and maternal comfort through techniques that conjure a nest or bedding.

Thus, this comprehensive study of Witkin's visual conversation with these art-historical styles gives us evidence that Witkin makes a case for the inherent mysticism of the ugly by demonstrating the ways in which he does so. Yet, the question arises as to why this visionary intuits ugliness as mystical. To return to the proviso laid out by Gellman, how does ugliness provide a super- or sub-sense perceptual unitive experience, which mirrors some of the properties of (the concepts of) God? The source of ugliness' mysticism is made more apparent when one can integrate the four features of the geomorphological features of ugliness, with Witkin's own spiritual reflections and extrinsic mystical sources.

The formless reality awakened by the ugly object is at the core of this explanation. Ugliness becomes a point of contact of the lurking memory of a monistic, indivisible Godliness – the 'object-lessness' of reality itself – that is frighteningly formless and unknowable. Ugliness is thus the experience of ontological mysteriousness. It brings a sub-sensory monism of extroverted mysticism, in which there are no separate perceptual objects, and all things that comprise reality, are 'one'. These are responses to the ultimate formlessness of the omnipresent and omni-capacious Godly. The comparative theologian Wilson (1991) asserts that God is, consequently, "beyond any human concept, hidden and inscrutable" (para. 4), which is related to "apophatic mysticism". Here

"nothing can be said of objects or states of affairs which are mystical experiences" – perhaps except for the very reality of their "formlessness and the 'unknowable'" (Gellman, 2017, para. 32).[177]

The idea that God is formless, and therefore unthinkable and mysterious as 'an object', appears in Christian and Jewish accounts of mysticism that Witkin studied for his own Master's thesis. For example, Kabbalistic terminology for God is *En Sof* ('without end'), a term intended to convey the "infinitude that is both ever-present in the world and yet utterly transcendent" (Lancaster, 2016, p. 26). This idea appears in the artist's musings and in descriptions of his work that are scattered throughout this study. Its prevalence corroborates that he thinks of formless experience of ugliness as an emanation of the attributes of the Divine. The ontological arcaneness explains why Parry writes that for Witkin "the camera is a sacred vessel through which pass rays of light, clues to the ultimate *mysteries* of existence" (p. 184, italics added). Witkin (1985) himself believes that "the mystical is unfathomable yet [he] tr[ies] to objectify it". For, for herein lies the source of "revelation and truth" (p. 185). Parry describes that for Witkin, the photographic process is a kind of "enlightenment". It is a pulling up of what is dark and concealed within him, to the surface *light,* which, in turn, illuminates the viewer. Witkin writes that he works from this submergence in "confusion towards clarity" (Horvat, 1989, para. 45). As Cravens (1993) quotes:

> Saints have loved the darkness because that's where they go to bring out people who are drowning. When I, as an individual, continue my journey into perception and better realities, I have to engage a person in darkness because I am in darkness …. You have to go to darkness to come out in the light (p. 58).

It also seems to be what Coke is referring to when he writes that "whilst photographers deal with what is known, Witkin gives us glimpses of the unknown as he sees it" (Coke, 1985, p. 18).

[177] Within the metaphysical philosophical tradition, this relates to Kant's *noumena,* which are objects or events that exist outside sensory/perceptual apprehension; are part of reality as it exists "in itself" (Beck, 2005, p. 694), which is the very extrasensory essence of mysticism. Wilson (1991) cites examples of this as a dimension of different belief systems. In the African spiritual tradition, in Pygmi Zairean, it is written, "Who can make an image of God? He has no body." In the Muslim Qu'ran (6:103) it says, "No vision can grasp Him, But His grasp is over all vision; / He is above all comprehension" (as cited in Wilson, 1991, para. 8). In the ancient Sanskrit Kena Upanishad (2:1-03), it is claimed "I cannot say that I know Brahman fully. Nor can I say that I know him not. He amongst us knows Him best who understands the Spirit of the Words 'Nor do I know that I know him not." Wilson cites a poem written in the Tao Te Ching: "[I]t is called formless form, thingless image,/ It is called the elusive, the evasive, confronting it, you do not see its face; following it you do not see its back." (as cited in Wilson, 1991, para.12)

Hence, while attempting to access and configure the Godly world through his photographs, Witkin advocates the very incomprehensible recondite and abstruse nature of God: this is "a place we cannot know" (Metaxatos, 2004, p. 9). This idea of concealment is implicit in the mysticism involving a *revelation* of God: the idea of his "self-disclosure of God to humanity" (Priest, 2009, p. 816). Cousins (1994) speaks of the "topographic relation" (p. 63) of hidden and hiding in the mind.[178] However, the ugly object is considered to be a relic of the hidden personal memory pre-symbolic period. Witkin's spiritual nostalgia for the purity of primitive perception is revealed in the way he organises his early memories according to this ugliness. Apart from the death of his sister in utero, other noted memories include the rancid flesh of his grandmother's amputated foot; the decapitation of a small girl in a motor vehicle accident at age six, and his first sexual encounter with an intersex person at a freak show.[179]

In this geomorphological, ugly mysticism, this earliness evokes the attributes of the true world – before creation. These layers of the earth are the amorphous lava of the origins of the universe and prehistoric life. Cosmogenic narratives about pre-world chaos support the idea of the actual formless world being 'earlier'. Greek mythology describes void as existing before as two recurring forms of indistinctness: the first is the idea of "primordial waters". The second is that of "primordial darkness", both of which are separated or bounded by earth or light. Examples of these occur in Hinduism and the Judeo-Christian Old Testament.[180] Moreover, the idea of early formlessness is subsumed within geomorphological theories themselves – a molten earth of the Hadean Eon, 3.5 million years ago, that was covered by a crust after cooling during the Eoarchean Era. That God is described as formless suggests the idea that the earlier universe was itself in a state that closely resembled the nature of God himself. Here the ugly object reminds us that all

[178] Cousins' (1994) topographical claim is that of older surfacing through newer. In terms of the object, this relation between that which hides and that which rises up takes on a "topographic relation": it is a "formless" layer underneath the surface of the earth.

[179] Witkin (2007) describes how he experienced the "rotting smell" of his relative's diseased leg. This, together with her ambulatory disability, made the connection between the outside world and that of shows where there were displays for entertainment of biological malformities and rarities, which was more direct and "sublime" for him (Witkin, 2000, p. 95). Witkin's (1985) first sexual encounter was with Albert Alberta who he met at a freak show on Coney Island, New York. This foundational experience occurred when he was assisting his brother with a painting that incorporated intersex other physically atypical people, including a three-legged man and a dwarf named "The Chicken Lady" (Witkin, 1985, p. 36).

[180] In the Hindu story of creation, the granddaughter of Brahman is Danu, meaning 'flowing liquid', and is associated with the unbroken, primordial waters that existed before creation.

illusionary forms have their source as a formless God and that there exists only this one thing (that may be arbitrarily divided).[181] This concept is in the Kabbalah's '*yeshod hashapot*', which Witkin embraces in his own exegesis.[182]

The idea that Godliness can be accessed through a special kind of "sub-sensory" state of mind, from which ugliness arises, is an ancient religious principle that governs practices such as meditations and prayer. Hui-Neng, a central figure in Chinese Chan Buddhism, refers to the nature of the mind as unbounded, interminable and without specific form.[183] However, the idea that the mind is a particularly special 'place' in which an experience of Godliness resides is more distinctive. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), the seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes acknowledged this as an innate reservoir of knowledge of God.[184] However, it is Jung (1973) who extends this personal reservoir of phantasies to the "collective unconscious". In his *Conscious, Unconscious and Individuation*, Jung (1973) writes of archetypal memories that they

> … evidently live and function in the deeper layers of the unconscious, especially in that phylogenetic *substratum* which I have called the collective unconscious. This localization explains a good deal of their strangeness: they bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past. It is the mind of our unknown ancestors, their way of thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, *gods* and men. The existence of these archaic strata is presumably the source of man's belief in reincarnations and in memories of previous experiences. Just as the human body is a museum, so to speak, of its phylogenetic history, so too is the psyche (pp. 3793-3794, italics added).[185]

[181] The doctrine of monism is pertinent here, since it denies the distinction between God and the world as separate.
[182] In the Kabbalah, *yeshod hashapot* refers literally to the "secret of the languages".
[183] "The capacity of the mind is as great as that of space. It is infinite, neither round nor square, neither great nor small, neither green nor yellow, neither red nor white, neither above nor below, neither long nor short, neither angry nor happy, neither right nor wrong, neither good nor evil, neither first nor last" (Hui-Neng, 2005, p. 9).
[184] Descartes' argument is found in his *Meditation III, Concerning God, That He Exists* (Descartes, 1993, pp. 24-35).
[185] In lieu of contemporary neuro-psychoanalysis, that attempt to locate this "reified" mind model in the actual biological structure in the brain, Jung writes in *The Structure of the Psyche*: "The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution born anew in the brain structure of every individual." (Jung, 1973, pp. 343-344). In Jung's 1916 essay *The Structure of the Unconscious* he posits the idea of the *old* "collective unconscious", which is thought to encompass the "soul" of humanity at large. It is considered to be an "ancient" store of collective, phylogenic memories: "[t]hese primordial images or "archetypes" as I have called them belong to the basic stock of the unconscious psyche and cannot be explained as personal acquisitions" (Jung, 1973, 229–230 p. 112).

Jung does not explore, at length, the possibility of having an innate memory of God himself. However, the geomorphological essence of ugly mysticism contains the premise that there is a kind of 'underground' recollection that is personally established as a deposit by the early infant of this time in which their interaction is with the primary (formless) mother or "other". This intersubjective mode is a kind of ancient 'relational space' held in a place in the mind. Freud refers to this as a "prehistoric period of life", almost as if the infant is "not yet in the living" (Rose, 2003, p. 117).[186] For these reasons, Witkin specifies that his mysticism is his personal visual project of his *own* inner world and experience: "What I really want is this really humble, individual connection, not with a religious institution" (Strauss, 2003, p. 51). His artistic process is a spiritual event in which the task is to "see what is in [him] … to glorify God". It leads us to see that we are "not alone…. We are [because God is within us] both finite and infinite and the same time" (Witkin, 1985, pp. 34-41)." This submergence into, and expression of, the spiritual content contained within the deep recesses of his *mind* is explicit in his reference to the way in which his "photography [is] a means with which to see and relive [his] *fantasies*" of that which is concealed beneath ordinary perception. As previously noted, Witkin declares that "these fantasies had no place in the ordinary, but only in the most secret and hidden things, the strange, the bizarre and the invisible" (Metaxatos, p. 60, italics added).

What is the value of such a message? If ugliness gives us a vision of God and holds spiritual truths about ourselves and the other objects world, could this be one possible way, that following Beardsley's (1982) thesis, the "ugly aesthetic" may become a form of the "aesthetically good"? Witkin's message, and the process of uncovering it through a formal art-historical study of ugliness, may awaken us to the power of art to implant meanings in aesthetic terms at large. It might hereby affect aesthetic experiences of the *Lebenswelt*, thereby *opening* us to reviewing our programmed responses to ugliness? Witkin facilitates a mystical journey characteristic of the Avant-Garde during a time of resurgence of aesthetic advocates for beauty. Ugliness journeys us deep within what has otherwise been considered scarily "exotic", "dark", or charted as "unusual"

[186] It is the infant's absence of language, or his "asymbolia" (inability to form symbols), it is argued, that lies at the root of his inability to form the concepts with which to represent or "think", those concepts which are implicated in the processes identification and perception of physical objects, which are at the core the ugly-object encounter. Since the experience itself is pre-linguistic, it cannot be retrieved and thought about in the form of "representational objects" of mature perception.

and often avoided (Moore, 2014, para. 21). With our understanding of the texture of ugliness, it helps us to deal with the fear and fascination in "facing and overcoming the untoward" in the quotidian purview (Moore, 2014, para. 21). However, more importantly, through conferring the mysticism of previous religious periods onto the ugly, he encourages a numinous gaze of reverence to such things – respect to the mosquito, the mildew, the monster or the maimed man. Seward's (1993) idea at the heart of Witkin's message, his yearning to "love the unloved, the damaged, the outcast" (p. 108) resonates, for such things hold the presence of God and are inextricable from our own existence. The ugly fails to conform to our ideals. It leaves us to question what the object, what any object, including the self really 'is'.

Can such a psycho-aesthetic training have the power to combat our politics involved in looking at the ugly: of marginalisation, ostracisation and a visual censuring of the ugly repertoire of objects established by visual culture at large? Can they alter a practice of voyeuristic attraction to these "interesting" objects of fascination as a "stuff of spectacle", with all the forces of "surveillance, objectification, fetishization, hyper realisation that such forms of looking entail" (Clark & Myser, 1996, p. 338)? Perhaps this kind of study actualised in Witkin's work begins the project of reacquainting us in our aesthetic vista, and promoting further curiosity about aesthetic varieties and their meaning and power. Can it thereby inspire aesthetic versatility and enrichment in art and life?

Such questions and areas, along with many others, have not been covered in this thesis. The study has, been delimited to exploring the presence of the ugly aesthetic in the artworks chosen. The nature of the "ugly aesthetic', for will require extensive work and continual refinement. Indeed, the descriptions of ugly experiences upon which the theocratisation was based, were limited. Pursuing empirical research into qualities of this subjective encounter would provide robustness to this theory of ugliness. It also acts as entry point for the study of other unique aesthetic properties and would enable greater theoretical organization of and engagement with aesthetic concepts—some of which are, as of yet, ineffable.

There is future work to be done to enhance our understanding and ability to identify *other* aesthetic qualities that one could apprehend in an artwork. Zangwill's (2001) so-called subtypes of

ugliness—the grotesque, macabre, Gothic, surreal, uncanny— have been attributed to Witkin's work. So too, has the more ambiguous category of the 'sublime'. However, this thesis only opened up the possibility of fleshing out these unique perceptual-felt textures. Greater attention ought to be given to develop accounts of these phenomena, and to explain how and why they can be said to be characteristic of Witkin's work. Such lacunae open up potential projects for future research. For example, they may propel us forward in our attempt to understand what features, other than pain, are shared by those that are 'ugly subtypes'. We are left to consider alternative ways of organizing, grouping or taxonomizing aesthetic terms. Do we even need to retain the purely evaluative function that the aesthetically beautiful/good and ugly/bad provide and, if so, for what purpose? Ought we to, and how do we reconstruct, our aesthetic value system? Are beauty and ugliness still considered to be the two main categories according to which all aesthetic terms can be organized, and why? Another question that arises in this thesis includes: how are aesthetic qualities to be attributed to other forms of art, such as performance? This is a reminder that the aesthetic, is not purely visual, but sensory, and challenges us to develop theories for the ugly aesthetic as it manifests in sound, smell, touch, taste.

The thesis provides a means by which to read the relation between ugliness and the mystical in the visual language of the selected paintings. This involves stipulating criteria or perceptual markers by which ugliness could be commonly identified. It also involved an attempt to decode the way in which a non-visual characteristic—the presence or feeling of God—is expressed visually over time. However, it is limited in its sampling of the only three art historical periods' ugly-mystical relation. It is confined to a close reading of the paintings and to only Witkin's photographic remakes. This means that the relationship between ugliness and mysticism has yet to be explored in many other areas of art: First, what is the mystical-ugly relationship in other periods in art history? Second, how might Witkin's position have developed in his more recent work? Third, and more broadly, are there other artists whose works holds the potential to continue the exploration of foregrounding the importance of 'ugliness' in the mystical encounter. What insights might that work lend to?

Indeed, ugliness breaks open our physical surface or conceptual semblance of our world of objects to make us privy to the truth of primordial indistinctness and elusiveness concealed beneath. This

intrinsically hidden divine revelation is further concealed in these selected paintings of art history, as their pictorial qualities bury the presence of ugliness with some other embodiments of the divine. Voros's poem thus distils the essence of Witkin's work as a gift of "evisceration, dismemberment, ravelled revelation / the world *silk scarf thick of fluttering itself inside*" (Voros, 2004, p. 84 italics added). It is the reason for which Elkin's comment that this artist is "a good example of cracking the shell of religion to reveal the real spirituality inside it", strikes as doubly true (p. 102). Blanchot, in his *Space of Literature* (1982), seems to point to the experience of geomorphological ugly as the source of the revelatory power of art itself. As Taylor elaborates, the origin of the work of art is the "intimacy of [the] tear, rent, fissure". To be opened is to be ruptured by the work of art to a place of non-meaning. This experience is for Blanchot:

> the experience of art. Art – as images, as words and as rhythm indicates the menacing proximity of a vague and empty outside; a neuter existence, null, without limit, sordid absence, a suffocating condensation where being ceaselessly perpetuates itself as nothingness. … But where [then] has art led us? To a time before the world, before the beginning. It has cast us out of our power to begin and end; it has turned us toward the outside without intimacy, without place, without rest (Blanchot, 1982 as cited in Taylor, 1987, p. 286).

Parry (1998) notes the doubly mysterious "dark *poetry* by which [Witkin] lives" (p. 182, italics added). It is ugliness and art that is ugly, that, in the words of Mandelstam, "… turns up time in such a way that the abyssal strata of time, its black earth, appear on the surface" (Mandelstam, 1921 as cited in Zeeman, 1998, p. 84). Witkin does indeed, 'rear' the ugly head, for he affords us a specific spiritual task of making sense of, and confronting, a glimpse of the otherwise inaccessible knowledge of the ancient unfathomable origins that are at once outside and part of us. As this luminary puts it in his Introduction to *Bone House* (1998):

> I have consecrated my life to changing matter into a spirit with the hope of one day seeing it all. Seeing in its total form, while wearing the mask from the distance of death. And there, in my eternal destiny, to seek the face I had before I was made (p. 15).

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APPENDIX: FIGURES

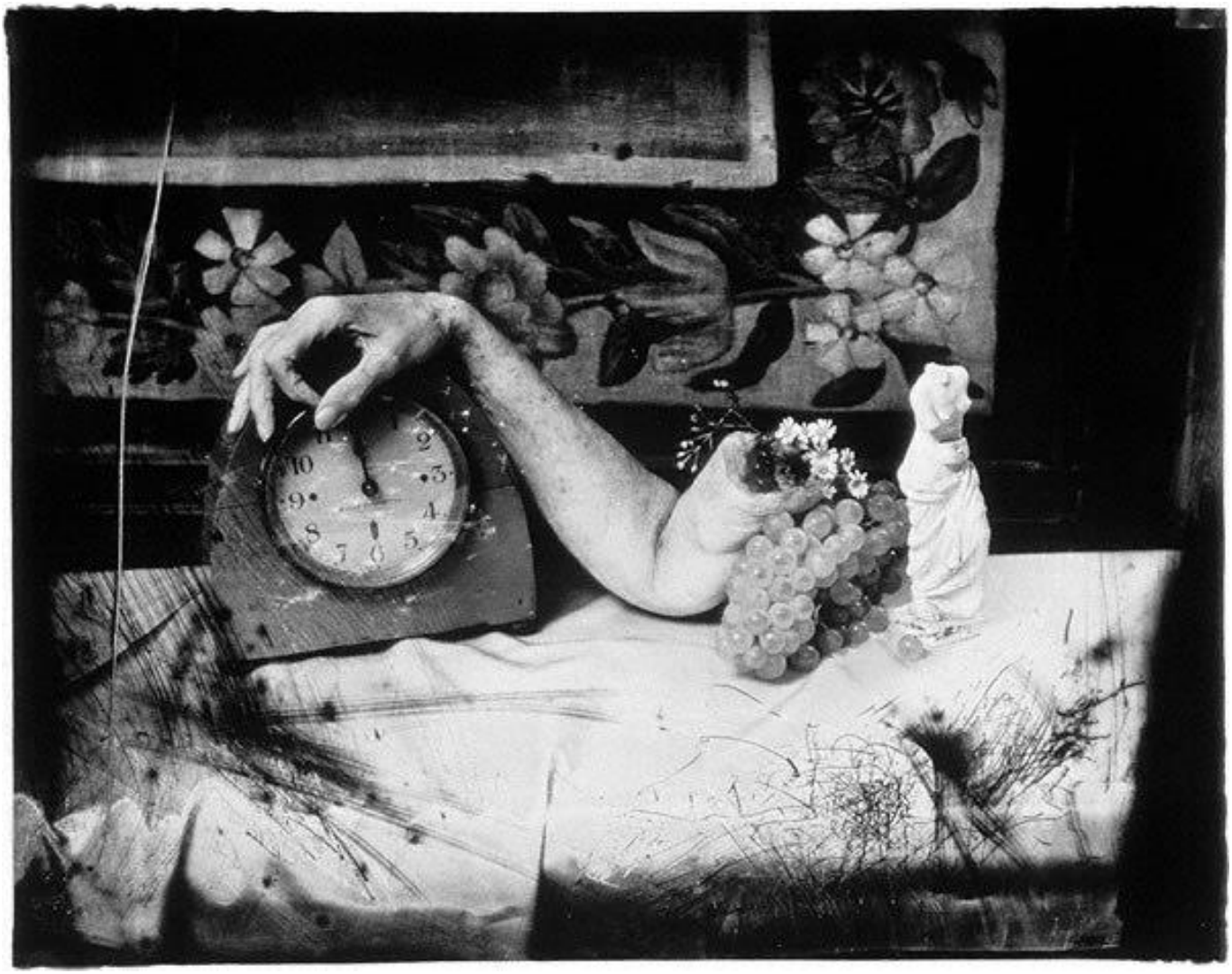

Figure 1. Witkin, *Anna Akhmatova*, 1998 (Chavez, 2012, para.20)

Figure 2. Witkin, *The Result of War: The Cornucopian Dog*, 1984 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 3, Goya, *Capricho No. 49: Duendecitos (Hobgoblins)*, 1799 (Widmer, 1972, n.p.)

Figure 4, Goya, Capricho No. 64: Buen viaje (Bon voyage) (Widmer, 1972, n.p.)

Figure 5. Goya, *Capricho No. 77: Unos a otros (What one does to the other)* (Widmer, 1972, n.p)

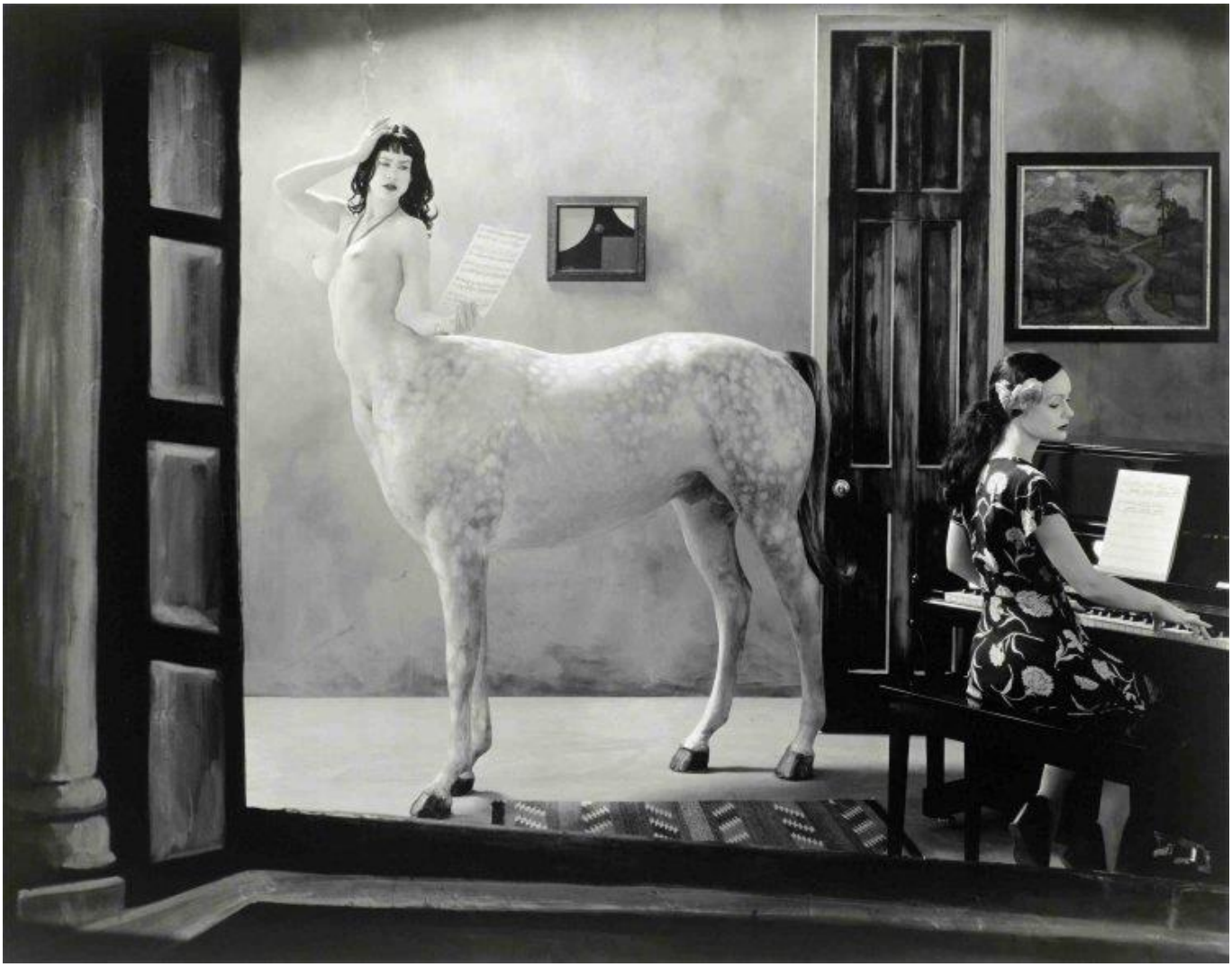

Figure 6. Witkin, *Night in a Small Town*, 1997 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 7. Witkin, *Siamese Twins, LA*, 1988 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 8. Witkin, *The Kiss,* 1982 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 9. Witkin, *Sanitarium*, 1989 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 10. Witkin, *The Bird of Quevada,* New Mexico 1982 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

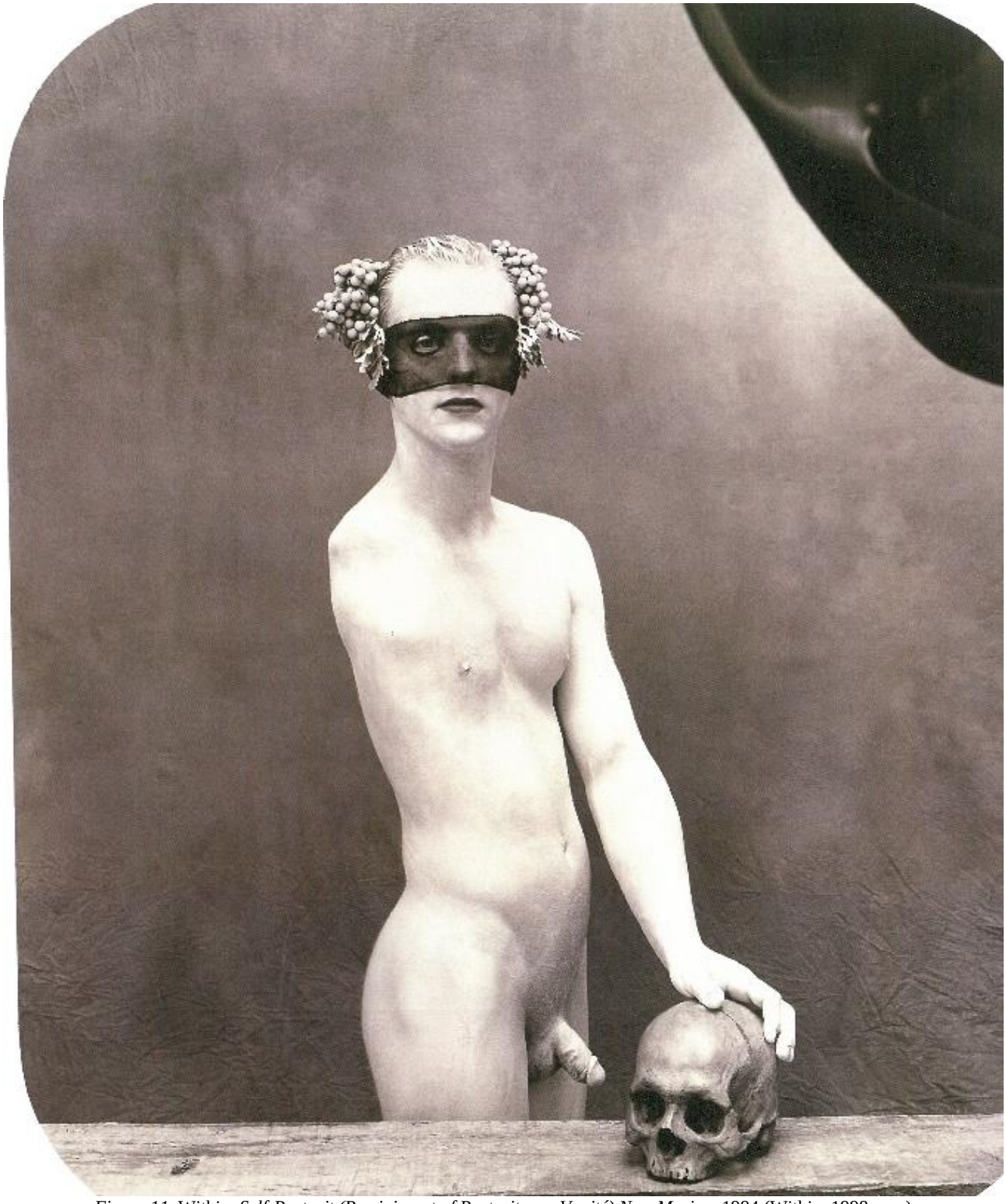

Figure 11. Witkin, *Self-Portrait (Reminiscent of Portrait as a Vanité) New Mexico*, 1994 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 12. Witkin, *Man Without Head*, 1993 (Witkin, 1998, n.p)

Figure 13. Witkin, *Queer Saint*, 1999 (Regan, 2001)

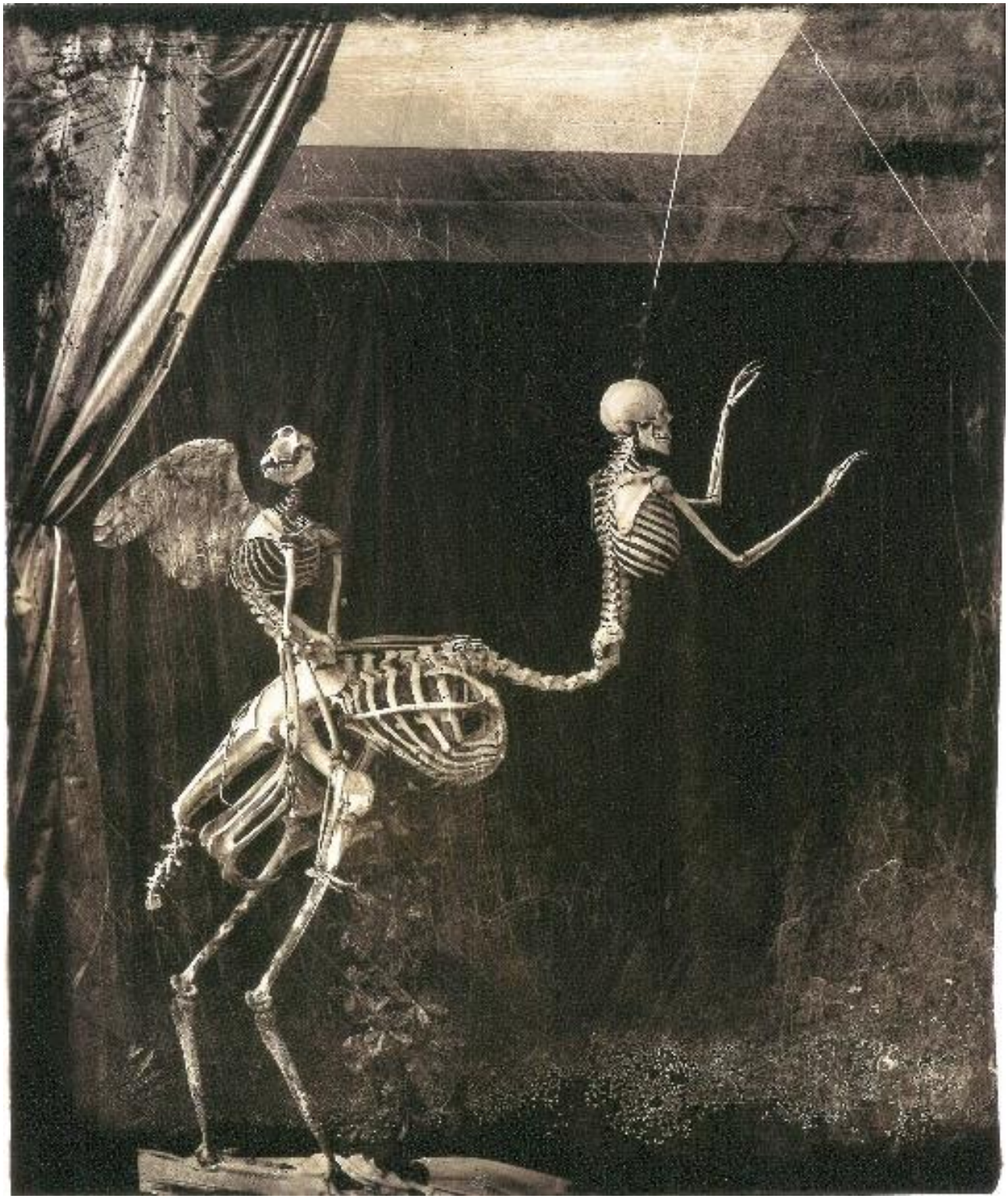

Figure 14. Witkin, *Cupid and Centaur in the Museum of Love, Marsailles*, 1998 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 15. Witkin, *Still Life, Marseilles,* 1992 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 16. da Sesto, *Leda and the Swan*, 1505-1510 (Kren & Marx, 2006)

Figure 17. *Botticelli,* The Birth of Venus, *1485 (Kren & Marx, 2016)*

Figure 18. Witkin, *Leda, Los Angeles*, 1986 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)

Figure 19. Witkin *Gods of Earth and Heaven, Los Angeles,* 1988 (Wright, 2016)

Figure 20. Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 1642 (Wikipedia Commons, 2006)

Figure 21. Rubens, *Venus at the Mirror*, 1613-1614, (Wikipedia Commons, 2010)

Figure 22. Rubens, *Susanna and the Elders,* 1608 (Krev & Marx, 2006)

Figure 23. *Rubens.* Het Pelsken, The Little Fur, *1638 (Lawson, 2006, p. 164)*

*Figure 2*4.van Steenwyck, *Still Life of Game, Fish and Kitchen Utensils*, 1646, (ArtUK, n.d)

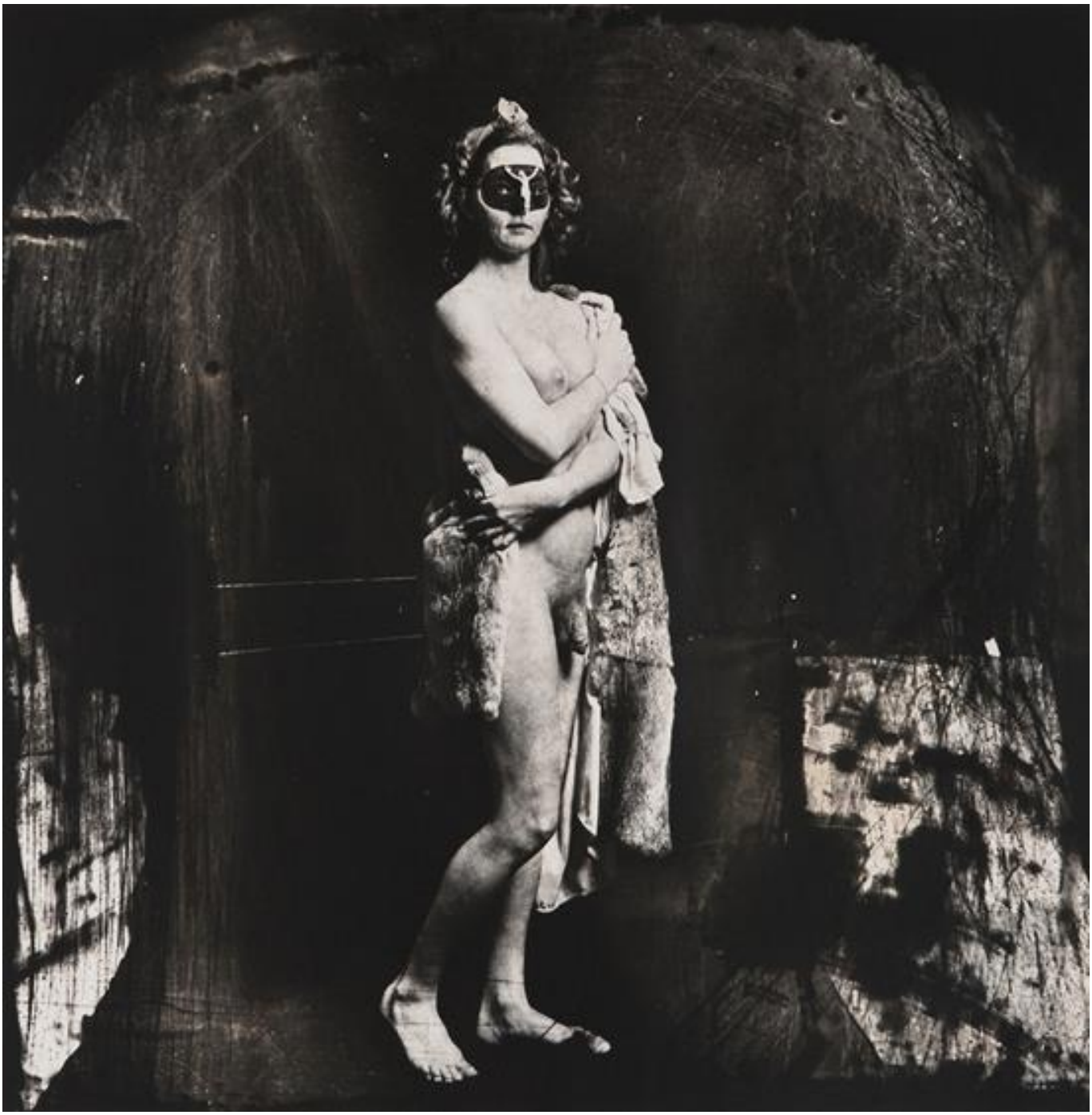

Figure 25. Witkin, *Journey of a Mask: Helena Fourment*, 1985 (Coke, 1985, p. 38)

Figure 26. Witkin, Feast of Fools, 1990 (Witkin, 1998, n.p.)